

Hermione Meets H2O

by Lynelle147

Category: H2O: Just Add Water, Harry Potter

Genre: Fantasy, Friendship

Language: English

Characters: Cleo S., Hermione G.

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2012-06-11 21:33:13

Updated: 2016-04-19 01:43:10

Packaged: 2016-04-26 13:32:10

Rating: T

Chapters: 20

Words: 36,735

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Set three months after Voldemort is defeated, Hermione goes on a special mission to find a new species in Australia. You'd be surprised what she finds...

1. Chapter 1

It had been three months since the Dark Lord had met his end. To Hermione, those three months had dragged on for what seemed to be years. In the the past three months Hermione and Harry had been living at the Burrow. Hermione had taken to sharing a room with Ginny and Harry stayed with Ron. Although the Weasleys seemed fine to outsiders, they were still grieving over Fred's death. Worst of all was George. Nobody could bear to even look at George without breaking down into tears themselves. Luckily for them, they did not have to see him often, as George spent days on end locked up in the room he had previously shared with his other half.

Harry and Hermione had acquired jobs at the Ministry of Magic shortly after the war. Ron had become a professor at Hogwarts, taking over for Madam Hooch who had accepted a position as the assistant coach to South Africa's national Quidditch team. Harry became an auror, which came as a surprise to nobody. Hermione worked for equality for all magical creatures.

Although the war was finally over, and Hermione had her dream job, she could not truly say she was happy. Working at a desk for hours upon hours was hardly close to what she had imagined. Also she could not go one day without thinking about Fred or Lupin or Tonks or even Colin Creevey. Why had she lived when so many had perished? What made her more deserving of life than Tonks and Lupin, who had left a newborn to fend for himself? These questions plagued Hermione. The only time she was really happy was when she was with Ron. But their days together were numbered due to the upcoming term. Ron would be leaving for Hogwarts in a number of weeks and Hermione knew she could not go with him. In three short weeks, Hermione would be completely

alone.

Hermione had still not reunited with her parents. She had checked up on them immediately after the war and had found a very happy, very in love couple. The Grangers were blissfully ignorant and Hermione did not want to bring back their memory of her quite yet. Sure she would have her family back but as much as Hermione needed her mum's shoulder to sob on, she knew that her parents were better off without a depressed, broken 18-year-old daughter. She thought she would at least have Harry share to her feelings with because Ginny still had not graduated from school, but Ginny had decided to drop out of Hogwarts; much to the dismay of her mother, to live with Harry in an apartment in London. She wasn't quite sure where she was going in life, but she knew she couldn't bear to be at Hogwarts, or worse, at home without her big brother.

So Hermione trudged around day after day to work at the Ministry and back to the Burrow. She was in desperate need of an escape, and that escape came to her on the tenth of August. Kingsley Shacklebolt, the recently elected Minister of Magic, came to Hermione with a proposition.

Hermione was on her lunch break when she heard a deep voice behind her clear their throat. She slowly turned around, wondering who it was that broke the silence. "Minister!" she exclaimed, surprised by his presence, "How are you?"

"I am well, Hermione," he replied, "Though I have noticed you have not fared so well since the demise of You-Know-Who. You seem a bit lost."

"Pardon me, Minister"-

"Kingsley, please. No need for formalities because of my new position," Kingsley interrupted.

"Okay, ah... Kingsley," Hermione continued a bit awkwardly. "I don't mean to seem ungrateful for this position or unhappy that I survived the war, but I just..." she trailed off, unsure of what exactly she was trying to say.

"I understand Hermione, believe me, aurors lose a great deal of friends in their lifetime. Just trust me when I say that you need a break," said Kingsley. "A holiday can produce wonderful results."

"Forgive me for asking, but what exactly are you proposing?"

"Just a bit of field research that I thought would suit you perfectly," replied Kingsley with a grin.

"Go on..." said Hermione warily. Kingsley went on to explain that the Ministry had picked up on a new sort of magic, possibly a new creature, on the Gold Coast of Australia. They had never heard of anything like it, and Kingsley figured that Hermione would be able to figure out what was going on, without exploiting the creature. It was also easy to come up with a cover for her; she was a 17-year-old exchange student from the UK. Preparations had already been made for her to stay with a family over there. All Hermione had to do was find out the source of the magic, keeping a detailed journal on her

findings, and enjoy the sunshine.

"Who knows," Kingsley added, "You could be the next Gilderoy Lockhart"

"But sir, that was all made-up," Hermione remarked, ever the know-it-all.

"Yes I suppose it was..." Kingsley mused. He cleared his throat. "Anyways, what you need to do is find the source of the magic, and if it is a creature, bring it back to the Ministry so it can be properly recorded as so. When you return you can work on its rights and so on."

"I'll do it," said Hermione with a slight grin. "When shall I be ready?"

"Apparate to the Gold Coast Airport tomorrow night at midnight. It will be 10 a.m. their time. Look for the Sertoris, that is who you will be staying with. You're a smart girl, you can figure out the rest of your cover." Kingsley directed.

"Okay," Hermione said eager to begin the task.

"Oh, and Hermione?"

"Yes Min- er, Kingsley?"

"Enjoy yourself," Kingsley added as he walked away.

2. Chapter 2

Meanwhile on the Gold Coast of Australia, Cleo was living in a state of euphoria. The water tentacle had been defeated, her secret was safe, and the love of her life was returning home to go to university. Plus, she had graduated! Nothing could ruin her happiness. Nothing except for perhaps some news from her father.

"What do you mean we're taking in a foreign exchange student?" Cleo demanded. "I'm no longer in high school! And it's summer, don't you find it a bit strange that it's summer yet they're coming now?"

"Now Cleo," Don said patiently. "This is a wonderful opportunity for both us and her. You'll have a new friend, possibly best friend, living under the same roof. I'm sure you two will get along wonderfully."

"Her?" Cleo inquired.

"Yes 'her'," Don said. All I know about her is that she is seventeen years old and from Britain."

"And her name...?"

"Oh, right, her name. I believe it was something strange...Harriet, Henrietta, Heather, oh yes, Hermione, that's it," her father said. "Did I mention we're picking her up tomorrow morning? You had better include her in your plans, Cleo. Make her feel welcome."

"Have you talked to Kim about this?"

Kim walked into the room at that moment and answered, "Of course he has. I'm just hoping she'll be a cooler sister than you."

With that Cleo rolled her eyes, muttered something about meeting up with Rikki, and ran out the door.

"How lame," Kim sighed, sinking down into the sofa and picking up a magazine.

By that time Cleo was already in the Pacific Ocean, halfway to the moon pool. Why? Why now? Her life was perfect right now. She had everything under control. But starting tomorrow she would have to put up with changes. This girl, this complete stranger was going to be living with her, sharing her room, sharing her friends, and Cleo was going to lie to her. It was inevitable. Hermione was just another person Cleo was going to lie to. She hated lying, probably because a while ago she had been pretty terrible at it, but with a secret like hers, you became good pretty quickly. Besides, lying was preferable to being exposed as a mermaid. That was definitely something the new girl would never know about.

"Cleo?" a voice called out, echoing within the moon pool. "What's wrong?" A blonde mermaid glided up next to Cleo and put her hand on her shoulder. "C'mon I know that face, something's up."

"Hey Bella," Cleo sighed, knowing she'd have to speak. Bella raised her eyebrows inquisitively. "How do you do it?" Cleo said softly.

Bella scrunched up her face. "Do what?" she asked, confused.

"Lie," Cleo spoke bluntly.

"It gets...easier," Bella said. "But I haven't been entirely honest with you guys. You see it's a bit hard for a nine-year-old to keep a secret..."

"You told?" Cleo gasped. This was the first she had heard about this.

"Well, yeah," Bella answered. "Look can we discuss this later? I can see you're avoiding my question. What's up?"

Cleo could see that Bella was not ready to talk about it so she continued where she had left off. "I don't wanna lie anymore Bella. It's hard doing this to people I love." Cleo moaned.

"Why haven't you said something before?"

"I've never felt this way before. I suppose it's because of the news my dad sprung on me this morning. We're hosting a British girl for a few months. It sounded fun and all and then it hit me, I'm going to lie to her. I lie to so many people that it feels completely normal doing so, and don't you see Bella? Lying isn't normal, not how much I do it anyway. I hate not being honest with people, not being myself. What do I do? How do I deal with all the deception and dishonesty?"

"You know what?" Bella said, lifting herself out of the moon pool.

"What's that?"

"You learn overtime that being a mermaid is a gift, something wonderful and magical that makes you unique, makes your life fantastic. You know what else you learn? Sometimes it just downright SUCKS."

And with that, Bella earned the tiniest of smiles from her best friend.

3. Chapter 3

Midnight was approaching quickly for Hermione. She had enthusiastically described her new job to everyone and the Wesley's, and Harry, were happy to see her happy. Ron was upset that he could not go with her to help her settle in, but cheered up when Hermione said she would meet him in Hogsmeade at least once a month while she was gone.

Packing confused her. It had been a while since she had been a Muggle and she had grown accustomed to the strange Wizarding ways. For example she had packed everything she needed inside of her purse like usual, until she had realized that pulling out her things Mary Poppins-style wasn't normal. So with one hour before she had to leave she rushed out to buy a suitcase to take with her. She figured most of her clothes would be inappropriate for the Australian heat anyways and packed lightly. At 12:00 am on the dot she hugged everybody goodbye, kissed Ron, and apparated to Australia.

"Dad, hurry up or we'll be late!" Kim yelled from the backseat of the car. She was very eager to meet Hermione, hopefully she would be cool, pretty, and nice- everything that Cleo wasn't.

"Relax, darling, we're here," replied Don. "Cleo, run in with Kim while I try to find a spot to park."

Cleo and Kim hopped out of the car while their father pulled away. Sam had stayed home to cook brunch for their guest. Cleo pulled out her phone to check the time, 10:15. Oops, they were fifteen minutes late. She quickened her pace leaving Kim running to keep up.

"You think that's her?" asked Kim, pointing to a girl of a medium height with brown bushy hair and a small suitcase.

"I dunno. How exactly did dad expect us to find her again? Why don't you go up and ask? It'd make things a lot quicker..." Cleo suggested.

"Fine," Kim said, crossing her arms, "But if it's not her, you're talking to the next girl we find." And with that she walked off.

Cleo watched Kim and the brunette conversing from afar and was surprised to find the twosome walking over to her. "Hello," the brunette said. "I'm Hermione, Hermione Granger...and you must be

Cleo."

"Um, yeah that's me," replied Cleo, a bit taken aback by her forwardness. "Why don't we head outside, I'm sure our dad is waiting for us. I bet you're tired. I'll let you take a nap before I start asking questions," Cleo said with a smile.

"That sounds brilliant, actually," Hermione said making her way to the doors, suitcase in tow.

Hermione stared out the window of the Sertoris' car. It felt odd to be a Muggle again. Everything seemed so different, so normal. She decided she liked Cleo. She looked as if she was a bit reserved, but Hermione didn't mind. Kim on the other hand gave her the impression that she wanted to use Hermione for her own personal gain. Hermione didn't know what to make of her just yet.

They made it home 20 minutes later and walked into the scent of eggs and bacon. Mr. Sertori kissed the woman that he introduced as Sam on the lips and Cleo playfully protested, telling him to stop embarrassing her. Hermione could not help but be reminded of her own parents, and the thought of them out there without her hurt. She felt herself wishing for a time when she was just Hermione the know-it-all and the worst that could happen was that her mum or dad was disappointed in her for eating chocolate. Cleo and Kim had that sort of normal, easy life and Hermione was envious, until she realized that now this was her life too.

Brunch was quiet, but not awkwardly so. Afterwards, Cleo showed Hermione to the room that they would share. It was large, complete with two twin-sized beds (new, Cleo had remarked), a mural of the beach, a fish tank, and it's own bathroom. Cleo excused herself, saying that she was meeting friends at the beach and let Hermione take a much-needed nap. Cleo thought Hermione's weariness was due to jet lag, but in reality Hermione had not slept in the past 24 hours.

Hermione awoke to Cleo standing over her, a sundress in her hands. "Put this on," she said, "And meet me downstairs in ten minutes, I want to get to know you better. Plus, there's some people I'd like you to meet."

Crap, she'd have to come up with a cover story, and fast. She groggily put on the sundress and splashed some water on her face to wake up. She tied her thick hair back into a ponytail and walked down the stairs. "Okay, I'm ready." she told Cleo

"Great," Cleo said grinning, "First stop, Rikki's. "

4. Chapter 4

Hermione followed Cleo out the front door and down the street. It was about 3:00 at this point, she hadn't slept for too long. She felt strange wearing a dress and longed for her usual pair of jeans. Hermione rarely dressed up, if she did it was for a very special occasion. She smiled as she thought of Ron's reaction to her at the Yule Ball. He had looked so silly in those old dress robes. She found herself missing Ron, though she had not even left him a day ago.

"Hermione? What is it you're thinking about? You've been so quiet and have some sort of dreamy look on your face..."

Hermione blushed. "It's nothing," she said.

"C'mon, you can tell me." Cleo nudged her with her shoulder. "I mean we're supposed to be like friends or something now, aren't we?"

"I've only just met you," Hermione pointed out. Cleo raised an eyebrow. "Fine," She sighed, "You're right, it's a boy."

"A boy, hey? Tell me about him."

"Well he has red hair and an awful lot of freckles. He's really funny and can be really stubborn at times, but he's always loyal to his friends."

"He sounds great, how long have you two been dating?" Cleo prodded.

"A few months," Hermione answered.

"The way you described him, I had expected you had been dating for years..."

"Well I've known him for a pretty long time. But enough about me, do you have a boyfriend?"

"Yeah, his name is Lewis. He really really cares about me. He'd never do anything to hurt me or break my trust, on purpose at least. He's really into science, marine biology in fact, and can get pretty wrapped up in his little projects. Actually he just got back from the States where he was studying. He's so smart and cute and just a wonderful guy." Cleo gushed.

"He sounds perfect for you."

"He is," Cleo said grinning. "Look, we're here." They had come to a rather large building with the word "Rikki's" in neon red lights. Cleo opened the door, "After you..." They both stepped through the door to the cafe. Cleo led Hermione over to a table in the corner.

"Come here often?" Hermione asked. She looked around the place. It had a modern feel to it with sleek booths and tasteful tables and chairs. The crowd consisted mostly of teenagers hanging out in the afternoon.

"At least once a day," Cleo said sheepishly. "This is where my friends like to hang out." 'Aside from the moon pool' she added in her head.

"So tell me about yourself."

"Um, well I grew up in England of course. I lived with my mum and dad, they're both dentists. I've always been sort of a know-it-all, but I have the right to be. I'm first in my class at my old school, you know. Ron, that's my boyfriend, we've been the best of friends

since we were eleven along with our other friend Harry. Ginny has sorta joined the group recently, but she's never going to be as close and Harry, Ron, and I. Now that I think about it, I've never really had a girl as a best friend. Never had any slumber parties or"-

"Wait, hold on, you've never had a slumber party?" Cleo asked, shocked. "My friends and I are having one tonight, you should come." 'Uh oh what was she thinking? The full moon was tonight! What if Cleo or her friends became moonstruck and exposed themselves to Hermione?' Cleo thought.

Before she could backtrack, however, Hermione answered with an enthusiastic, "That sounds great! Of course I'll come!"

Seeing no way of uninviting Hermione now, Cleo continued the conversation. "Wait so you and Ron are dating, doesn't that make Harry sort of a third wheel?" she asked struggling to make sense of their friendship.

"No it's not like that. It's like we've always been so close that it doesn't matter that two of us are now in love. Harry's nothing but happy for us. He's seen our whole relationship from the beginning and is glad to finally see us happy. When three people go through the things that we have, a bond is created, one that can never be broken... Sorry I've gone off topic haven't I? Please, just forget I said that. You probably have no idea what I'm getting at anyways," Hermione said.

Cleo knew exactly what she was talking about, however. She had formed the same kind of bond with Rikki and Emma and now Bella because of their mermaid secret. But what was it that Hermione was talking about? She certainly wasn't a mermaid because Harry and Ron weren't mermen. She'd have to try and get Hermione to spill another day though because at that moment she saw Rikki walk through the door with Bella and Lewis close behind. "Hermione I'd like to introduce you to some people."

The trio walked over to the table and filled in the empty seats. "This is Bella and Rikki, my best friends, and Lewis, my boyfriend."

"Hello," Hermione said. "I'm Hermione, you know, the foreign exchange student." The three Australians exchanged hellos with Hermione.

"Hermione is going to be joining us at our sleepover tonight." Cleo told them.

Hermione watched as everyone's eyes widened. "Tonight?" Bella sputtered. Why did everyone suddenly become tense?

"Cleo, might I have a word with you, outside?" Rikki asked angrily.

"Look if it's such a problem for me to be coming I don't have"-

"It's no problem at all," Rikki said with a sickly sweet smile on her face. She stood up. "Cleo, you coming?" Cleo got up as well and

followed Rikki out of the cafe.

Hermione sat back in her chair, in awe of what just happened. Bella looked up at her kindly. "Don't mind Rikki," she said. "Trust me, it's nothing personal. I'd love for you to come."

Hermione was confused. If it was nothing personal, then what was it? Was Rikki the kind of magical creature she was looking for? The idea was entirely ridiculous and Hermione quickly shook it out of her head.

"So Hermione, I hear you're smart," Lewis said trying to make conversation. "What's your favorite subject?"

Hermione racked her brains trying to figure out what she had liked back in primary school. "Erm, English," she answered reckoning it was the only Muggle subject she had more than a fifth grade comprehension on.

"Oh that's interesting. Who's your favorite author?"

This she could answer. She loved books, Muggle books and Wizard books equally. However she got too excited and blurted out "Bathilda Bagshot," before she could properly think of a Muggle author.

"Bagshot, I don't think I've heard of her. You'll have to loan me one of her books sometime," Lewis said.

"Um, yeah, of course," Hermione stammered. "Look I better go finish unpacking before the sleepover tonight..."

"Do you even know your way home?"

"I'll manage," Hermione answered as she briskly got up and walked out the door.

5. Chapter 5

Five minutes later Cleo and Rikki walked back inside to find Hermione missing. "Lewis!" Cleo yelled. "You let her leave? We need to moonproof the house, how are we going to do that with Hermione there?"

"Why are we even moon proofing? The moon hasn't affected you guys in ages. I say you just have a nice, old-fashioned sleepover tonight. You know, popcorn, movies, whatever it is girls do." Lewis replied.

"Lewis I have I feeling, well we've all felt it actually," Bella glanced at both Rikki and Cleo, "That tonight's going to be different. I think that the moon pool's repaired itself and if it has, who knows what power it holds over us.

"And you guys didn't think to say anything? This could be important!"

"We didn't want to worry you. We thought we had it all under control. It actually was under control until Hermione came along." Cleo said

apologetically.

"Besides this feeling, it's probably that- JUST a feeling. I don't see why everyone is freaking out," Rikki said, trying to be rational.

Lewis sighed. "Well there's nothing that can be done about it now that Hermione's at your house."

"We realize what we've done Lewis and we just have to accept the consequences. More than likely nothing is going to happen tonight, but if something does, we can deal with it." Cleo said trying to convince herself nothing was going on. She was always the most superstitious of the group. Why was she worrying? The moon pool had been destroyed months ago, why would it affect the mermaids now? The answer was simple, it wouldn't.

"Oh really. And what about Hermione? What if she sees you moonstruck or even worse, with tails?" Lewis asked.

"Like we said, we deal with it," Rikki countered. "I don't see why you're such...such a Debbie Downer all the time Lewis. We can take care of ourselves! If Hermione sees something, we make her keep her mouth shut. I can be pretty intimidating you know..." she demonstrated by bringing Lewis's juice to a boil.

"Woah Rikki, calm down," Cleo told her, playing peacemaker. "Why are we even discussing this? Hermione won't find out- not tonight, not ever. We've kept this secret for nearly four years. Nothing is happening tonight. End of conversation." She rose. "Rikki? Bella? We have a slumber party to get to." She walked out with Bella and Rikki on her heels.

Hermione had wandered the streets near Rikki's for at least fifteen minutes at this point and had finally admitted to herself that she was lost. She planned on apparating, until a short redhead came up behind her.

"Lost?" the girl asked.

"Sort of," Hermione replied quietly.

"Well I think I can help you. Where exactly are you going?"

"22 Wilby Way. I believe it's somewhere near the docks."

"I know where that is, I could help you if you're interested."

"Actually, I think I remember where to go now, but thanks for the offer. My name's Hermione, I'll probably see you around." The ginger seemed nice and all, but Hermione felt something was off about her. Take her hair for example. It was not Weasley red but box red. If she couldn't trust that her hair was real, how could she trust her at all? Besides, she would rather just Apparate, it was far faster.

"Okay. My name is Sophie. I'll see you later?"

"Of course. Bye." Hermione said turning to walk away. She waited

until the girl was out of sight, then apparated to Cleo's backyard. Once there, she ran inside and to Cleo's bedroom. The girls would most likely be home soon and she really did need to unpack.

Hermione pulled what few belongings she had packed and laid them out on the bed. She was surprised to find a sneakoscope tucked in with her jeans. She smiled. Ron must have packed it for her. He was always so protective of her, when would he learn she was capable of defending herself? She had saved his sorry behind more times than she could count. Even though she felt the sneakoscope belittled her powers as a witch and as an intelligent female, she stuffed it in the pocket of her sundress just in case.

Hermione didn't know where in Cleo's room to put her things, so she began searching for empty drawers. Finding none, she stood up. On top of the dresser lied a glimmering blue gem on a loop of string. She could see why Cleo had opted not to put it on that day, the string was worn thin in a certain spot. The jewel was very enticing to Hermione. She picked it up to further inspect it.

The cool rock felt powerful in her hand. That's the only way she could describe it. This stone in her hand held an immense amount of power, but not in a bad way. It definitely wasn't a horcrux, but there was something special about it. Hermione knew it wasn't merely jewelry. She couldn't continue investigating it, however, because as she held it in her palm stroking it with her thumb, she heard a door slam.

"I'm home," she heard Cleo shout. "Hermione are you here?"

"I'm in your bedroom," Hermione called out. She heard Cleo's footsteps coming up the stairs. She knew she had a choice to make: ask about the stone, which could possibly make Cleo suspicious, or further her own investigation of it. She chose to ask.

Cleo walked through the door. "Why have you got my necklace?" she asked slowly, one eyebrow raised.

"I'm sorry, it's just so beautiful, almost as if it was...magical."

"Don't be ridiculous," Cleo scoffed. "There's no such thing as magic."

"Anything's possible," Hermione replied with a grin. Was it just her or was Cleo getting nervous?

"Yes, but only a fool would believe in such a thing. Magic isn't real."

"You think I'm foolish? Need I remind you that I am the equivalent of a valedictorian at my old school?"

"Right, I remember you saying that. Well fairy tales might be real over in England, but round here they're just that; fairy tales," Cleo said snapped.

"They may be fairy tales, but who's to say they aren't true?" Hermione retorted. She saw no problem in having a bit of fun. She enjoyed debates, especially when she won. "Anyways, where are your

friends?"

"Bella and Rikki? They stopped by the beach for a bit."

"Afternoon swim?"

"Yeah, something like that," Cleo replied, a smirk on her face. "Look I'm going to take a shower. There's loads of room in my closet for your things if you want to hang them up." She walked through the door leading to the bathroom and promptly closed it, locking it in the process.

Hermione took her Sneakoscope out of her pocket and looked at it. It reminded her of home. She placed it on the dresser and began hanging up clothes. She heard the sink turning on. Out of nowhere there was a loud thump. "Cleo are you okay?"

"Um, yeah," Cleo answered. "I just tripped over a towel." Suddenly, Hermione heard a whistle. She whipped around, startled to see the Sneakoscope lit up and spinning on the dresser. That was odd. Why would Cleo have any reason to lie? Hermione would have dismissed it, thinking it faulty, but then she remembered Scabbers, otherwise known as Peter Pettigrew. She figured that as long as Cleo wasn't hurt, there was no need to force Cleo to explain herself. What was she supposed to say? Hey, Cleo what's really going on, my magical lie detector told me you were lying? No, it was better to ignore it.

6. Chapter 6

****A/N Hey guys, I just wanted to thank everyone for reading, especially Cellophane Soldier, Mainn, and Malix2. I don't know where I would be without your reviews. They really make me so happy and motivate me to keep writing. This is a pretty short chapter, and I feel kinda bad ending with a cliffhanger so I might end up posting another one later. I'll have to see what I can do. Anywaaaays without further ado, here's Chapter 6:****

Cleo walked out of her bathroom, finished with her bath. She desperately needed to moon proof the house, but Hermione would surely become suspicious. An idea quickly came to her. "Hermione, could you do me a favor?"

"Sure what is it?" Hermione responded wanting to help.

"Could you run up to the store and pick up some popcorn? We're all out."

"Of course, if you tell me how to get there." Cleo scribbled down directions to the closest convenience store and sent Hermione on her way. As soon as Hermione closed the front door she called Bella, Rikki, and Lewis, Zane, and Will for extra help. They all promised they'd be over soon.

Cleo's friends kept their word and the doorbell rang 10 minutes later. The girls piled in closely followed by the guys carrying black plastic and tape. Rikki barked out orders and they each headed to different rooms with their supplies.

It did not take very long to finish covering the windows. Lewis, Zane, Cleo, and Rikki were familiar with the routine and Bella and Will learned fast enough. The mermaids kissed their respective boyfriends goodbye. Zane and Will left soon after but Lewis was putting up a fight.

"Lewis, you really need to go," Cleo pleaded. "Hermione will be here soon."

"Uh, Cleo," Rikki interrupted.

"Hold on," Cleo said not paying any attention to her. "Look, I know you want to stay to help us but don't you realize that you already have? You moonproofed like my entire house and-

"Cleo..."

"I said hold on, Rikki," Cleo snapped. "Please leave I'll be fine tonight, we all will. There's no reason for you to stay."

"But, Cleo," Lewis started.

"The moon? Relax, we'll be fine. I'll meet you at Rikki's for smoothies tomorrow, okay? And don't worry, nothing's going to happen with-

"CLEO!"

"What Rikki?" Cleo whipped her head around, only to see Hermione standing in the doorway with a plastic bag in hand and a confused look on her face.

"Oh god," Hermione said strangely. "Please don't tell me you're werewolves."

The mermaids and Lewis started laughing hysterically. "No," Bella managed to choke out before getting caught in another wave of laughter. The room grew silent when they realized Hermione wasn't laughing.

"Oh, you were serious?" Rikki asked.

"Don't be silly, of course I wasn't," Hermione answered with the strange expression still on her face. She turned to Lewis. "This may be my first sleepover but if movies are correct, no boys are allowed. Bye Lewis."

Lewis slowly moved to the door. He had to leave now. Cleo grinned. He hadn't come up with a cover as to why he was here, and therefore had to go. "Goodnight Lewis," she said sweetly. She pulled out the DVDs they had planned to watch and declared "Let the slumber party begin!"

Hermione knew she was going to have to confront Cleo about what she had heard, but she wanted to discover more herself first. Plus, she needed Cleo to trust her or she would get nothing out of her. For that reason she smiled and played along with all her games until the sun went down. She devoured popcorn while watching chick flicks, sang karaoke, and learned how to French-braid hair (nobody was willing to attempt to tame Hermione's bushy hair).

Hermione started to notice that the girls were avoiding the windows which had been curiously covered by black plastic. She thought back to Cleo talking about "moonproofing." Obviously something happened when they saw the moon.

All of a sudden, Hermione made a rash decision to rip down the plastic and see what happened. She felt the waistband of her pajamas, making sure her wand was there, just in case they were werewolves. Her third year was not easily forgotten.

Slowly she got up so that she did not draw attention to herself. She stepped over the girls who were now laying half-asleep in sleeping bags on Cleo's floor. "Hey guys, what's this?" The three girls rolled over to look at her. Before they looked away, Hermione tore down the plastic covering the window and white moonlight streamed in.

Suddenly, Hermione was faced with three glassy-eyed girls making odd hand gestures. What was going on?

7. Chapter 7

"Step aside please, Hermione," Rikki said politely. "We want to go swimming."

"I'm sorry but you can't right now," Hermione replied, saying what she thought Lewis would say. He had been trying to protect them from moonlight, she figured that protection included water as well.

"Water is so beautiful. I want to go to Mako. You can't stop me." Rikki took a step forward. She opened her right hand and raised it so that her palm faced Hermione. "I'll hurt you if I have to," she said casually as if she were discussing the weather.

Hermione took her wand out, hiding it behind her back. Bella and Cleo took their places on either side of Rikki and made their own hand gestures. Cleo had stuck her hand out as if grabbing a doorknob and Bella pointed her wrist upward and and slightly curled her fingers.

All of a sudden Cleo began turning her hand and the window was thrown open by a gust of wind. "We. Want. To. Swim." she said.

Rikki slowly curled her fingers and their glasses of water from earlier began boiling. Also, a corner of a curtain burst into flames. Hermione grabbed a water before it could evaporate and dumped it on the fire. The fire was put out, but Hermione was standing in a puddle. Bella thrust out her hand and the puddle turned to jello, causing Hermione to lose her balance.

She had no choice. These girls were clearly dangerous. Hermione whipped her wand out and with the words Petrificus Totalus, paralyzed the trio.

With the girls incapacitated, Hermione sunk down onto her new bed. Clearly these girls were something. First the stone, now this deliberate use of magic caused by the moon. Hermione was now left

with the question of when to confront them. Should she erase their memories and continue searching for clues in the morning? What if she presented them with the evidence against them and asked what they were? Hermione had completely forgotten that they had seen her perform magic also. Well, that memory had to go...unless it could be used to her advantage. If she revealed her secrets, Bella, Cleo, and Rikki would feel compelled to reveal their own. It was a great plan and she'd begin it in the morning. With the Mobilicorpus spell she moved each girl to their respective bed and climbed under her own covers, confident that the spell would hold until morning.

Cleo groggily woke up at 8 the next morning. What had happened last night? Uh oh, she had no memory of it. Last thing she remembered was rolling over in her bed and looking on as Hermione tore down the plastic. After that, nothing. She must have been moonstruck. She quickly sat up, taking in her surroundings. Hermione was nowhere to be seen and Bella and Rikki were sleeping. She shook them awake, panicking.

"Guys, guys wake up," she whispered urgently. Rikki threw a pillow at her. Bella rubbed her face, blinking. "This is serious, something happened last night!" That statement woke them up faster than anything else.

"What do you mean 'something'?" Bella asked.

"Well think about it, what do you remember about last night?" Cleo responded.

"I...well...nothing I guess," Bella said confused. "I've never been affected by the moon before, though, except for the water tentacle. I wouldn't know the symptoms but-"

"Well, I would and I can definitely say that we were moonstruck last night," Rikki interjected.

"What do you think happened? You think Hermione saw something?" Cleo said worriedly.

"'Do you think Hermione saw something?'" Rikki mimicked. "Of course she saw something! Do you remember the trouble we used to cause when we were moonstruck? We certainly weren't sitting around playing checkers like good little mermaids!"

Cleo hushed her. "Keep your voice down, Hermione's around here somewhere."

"So? It's too late isn't it? Might as well shout it to the world!" Rikki sat up. "Hey everyone, guess what? I'm a-"

Cleo clapped her hand over Rikki's mouth. "Are you insane?" she said in a hushed voice. "We have no idea what she knows. For all we know she knows nothing." She narrowed her eyes at Rikki. "You need to learn to control yourself."

Rikki rolled her eyes. "So I've heard," she said with a smirk.

"C'mon guys, let's just go downstairs. We have to figure out the damage we've caused sooner or later." Bella said rationally.

"I pick later," Rikki decided.

"I pick never," Cleo volunteered with a smile.

"Oh, shut up you two," Bella said playfully. She rose to her feet and helped the two of them up. "Let's go."

Hermione listened to the voices talking upstairs and reviewed what she was going to say in her head once they confronted her. It was bound to happen seeing as she had deliberately used magic in front of, well, Muggles. She was surprised she hadn't received an owl from the Ministry yet. It was probably because England was so far away and she'd be getting a letter soon enough. Kingsley would be angry with her for lasting less than a day. How pathetic, the brightest witch of her age, taken off her investigation for using magic in the presence of Muggles. Hermione felt ashamed. She thought over the conversation one more time. It'd go something like this:

Cleo: I saw you use magic, what are you?

Hermione: A witch

Rikki: Witches aren't real.

Hermione: Yes they are. Now that I've spilled my biggest secret, tell me your whole life stories.

Bella: Uh, no?

Hermione: Um, okay... Well I'll just leave then. Obliviate.

She sighed. This conversation would be tricky. She needed their secrets, but didn't want to share hers, at least not yet. She whipped up some eggs and pancakes with the help of some magic and filled four plates. Hermione heard three pairs of feet coming down the stairs.

"Good morning," Cleo said with a nervous smile. Was she making that face because she was scared of Hermione?

"Um, I've made breakfast," Hermione said, gesturing to the food on the table. "Will you guys have a seat? I think we need to talk."

The three girls sat down cautiously. "What about?" Rikki asked.

"Well last night, actually."

Rikki lowered her eyebrows. "What about last night?"

"Don't you remember?" Hermione asked, confused. Did they genuinely not know what happened?

"No," Rikki said sheepishly. "Sorry."

"Care to fill us in?" Bella asked.

Hermione was relieved. They didn't see her use magic, they didn't know what she was. But she still remembered them using magic. Maybe

by using vague statements and a knowing tone, she could work their lack of memory to her advantage.

"First off, there was the moon. One glance at it and you all went mad. You kept muttering about Mako and water. Something about swimming?"

"Look, I can explain..." Cleo started.

Bella shushed her. "Let her finish." She turned to Cleo. "Go on."

"I told you that you weren't allowed, I thought its what Lewis would have said and you guys got angry. Really, really angry. You stared at me with these glassy eyes and threatened me. You were doing something funny with your hands. Something like this," she mimicked Rikki's sign. "I was really confused. You didn't have weapons." She decided to lie. They'd probably offer more information if they felt guilty. "Then you closed your hand into a fist," she looked at Rikki, "And the tips of my hair started to smoke. The curtains caught on fire too. Suddenly, the window burst open and a gust of wind knocked me over. I stood up and threw a glass of water over the fire and it splashed everywhere. And then..." she trailed off.

"And then what?" Cleo asked.

"And then we turned into mermaids," Rikki whispered. She raised her eyebrows at Hermione.

Hermione nodded in confirmation. She was so confused. She was going to say the water turned into jello but the information Rikki offered up was far better. These girls believed they were mermaids? They had to be joking. Mermaids lived in the water in their underwater kingdoms. They couldn't be understood on land. They were violent creatures, although perhaps she was biased, seeing as they held her hostage. These girls were as likely to be mermaids as they were to be centaurs. She didn't mention this to the girls however. She just sat silently as Cleo told their story, committing it to memory so she could later write it down.

Cleo looked up when she finished talking about the ins and outs of being a "mermaid". "Look, we should probably go meet up with the guys, can you be left alone for a couple of hours?"

"Yeah, I was thinking about checking out the library," Hermione said with a smile. "School starts in a few weeks, you know."

"Okay, well call us if you need anything. Oh, and this probably goes without saying, but if you tell, Rikki will set you on fire." Cleo said as they walked out the door.

Oops, Hermione was already breaking the rule. As soon as they left, she sat down to write a letter to Kingsley, telling him that she had found the magical creature and was currently researching it. She looked outside her window to find a large barn owl looking at her expectantly. It took her letter in its talons and flew off to the Ministry.

The three mermaids headed down to the cafe to meet Lewis for smoothies, and tell him what had happened. He was the most involved of the guys so they felt they should tell him. Will and Zane would have to wait until later to hear about it, for there really wasn't a reason for telling them unless a problem arose.

Lewis freaked out, as expected. "She knows? I told you this was a bad idea. What are we going to go?"

"Just relax, Lewis. We aren't going to do anything." Rikki answered.

"What kind of plan is that?"

"It'll work. Trust me."

"Trust you? You want me to trust you? Look where that got us last time. I trusted you to have a nice girly sleepover, I trusted you to tell me if anything changed with the moonpool, I trusted you when-

"Well we all trusted you with our secret," Rikki said. "And now we're going to have to trust Hermione."

"Look, we're all sorry and all, Lewis, but worrying won't help us now. Hermione's a nice girl, she's not going to do anything stupid." Cleo said.

"She's a 'nice girl'? Cleo you've known her for a day!"

Cleo threw up her hands in exasperation. "Don't you think we know that? We can't do anything at this point to help matters!"

"Lewis, do you mind if we continue this later? I really wanted to go for a swim with the girls before Hermione comes looking for us." Bella interrupted.

"Yeah, fine, whatever. I'll see you guys later." Lewis said, deep in thought.

"Thanks Lewis!" Cleo pecked him on the cheek and stood up. "Coming, Rikki?"

"Well, actually I was going to meet Zane at the beach. We only just got back together you know and I wanted for us to spend some time together." Rikki answered, blushing a little.

"Oh, that's so sweet," Bella said smiling. "I guess we'll catch you later too then. Have fun!"

The two girls walked out of Rikki's and out onto the beach. They waited until nobody was looking, and dove into the waves.

In a matter of five minutes they had made it to the moonpool.

Bella surfaced first. She rolled over onto her back and floated with a slightest of smiles on her lips. She was no sooner disturbed by Cleo shaking her. "Hey!" she exclaimed, splashing Cleo with water. Cleo grinned and caught the water before it could reach her, sending it back at Bella with a flick of her wrist. Bella giggled.

"Look, Bella, about our conversation the other day..."

"What about it?"

"What happened when you were nine?" Cleo said, cutting straight to the point.

Bella grimaced. "I was hoping you had forgotten."

"Well if it wasn't important I wouldn't bring it up. Clearly you don't want to talk about it."

"Why is it so important?"

"Because I was thinking about...telling. I mean once this whole Hermione thing blows over. I want Sam to know about it, so I have someone, a mother figure, to rant and cry and whine to. And she could cover for me, like with Dad and Kim. And if she handles it well maybe I could even tell Dad, you know?"

"Cleo, you know that's not possible..."

"See that's what everyone always says- you and Rikki and Lewis. But why? Why can't we tell our families? Our boyfriends know. It's a stupid rule and we're stupid for letting this secret come between us and our families when we can help it."

"Cleo, now is not the time for this."

"Then tell me Bella, when is?"

Bella sighed. "Look, Cleo, the last thing I wanna do is tell you how to run your life, so go ahead and do what you think is right. I'd really appreciate it if you held off on it though. You have Hermione to talk to now, not to mention Rikki, Lewis, and me. Don't make a rash decision."

"But you told anyways, didn't you?"

"The circumstances were different. You haven't the slightest idea what you are talking about, so please, stop."

That immediately shut Cleo up. Bella never got angry like that, it was just part of her personality to be happy all of the time. She wanted to know more, but she knew Bella wouldn't talk.

"Sorry if I upset you, I just want all the information I can get before I make a decision. Race you back?" Cleo asked with a weak smile on her face.

"I think I'll just take it slow," Bella replied softly.

Cleo sighed. "You know you can talk to me right?" she said, then slipped down into the water and with the flick of her tail she was gone.

"Not about this," Bella said to herself.

9. Chapter 9

****Hey, I just wanted to say thank you to all my great readers out there, especially those of you that leave reviews. I seriously love you guys! Oh and I'm sorry for the short chapter yesterday...sooo to make up for it, here's a long one! Yaaaay!****

A month had gone by on the Gold Coast in what seemed like no time at all. Hermione surprisingly fit perfectly into the group. Zane and Will knew that she knew, and although they were a bit angry at first, they soon accepted her. Cleo and Hermione had grown really close due to all the time they spent together, but Hermione was no closer to revealing her secret than she was on the day she arrived. The days had passed without event, long and wonderful and carefree, like summer days often do. Hermione had all but forgotten why she was there in the first place. She spent her time swimming with mermaids, and did some exploring of her own with the help of some gillyweed.

In no time at all, it was time for Hermione to visit Ron at Hogsmeade. She woke up and went to Rikki's with the girls for breakfast, savoring her smoothie because it seemed Rikki and Zane were due for another breakup. Afterwards the girls swam to the moonpool while Hermione "took a boat." In reality, she Apparated to the entrance of the cave, slid down the hole, and met with the girls inside. She had given the mermaids a huge head-start and found them deep in conversation when she got there.

Once again, Cleo was ranting about secret-keeping. "I just don't see the problem in telling," she whined for the millionth time.

Rikki had had it with her constant complaints. "Just shut up already!" she snapped. "If you're gonna do it, do it. If not, we don't want to hear about it." Bella gave her a look. "What?" Rikki said. "Somebody had to say it."

"I just have reason to believe that nothing bad will happen if I tell," Cleo retorted glancing at Bella meaningfully. Bella slightly shook her head and whitened.

"And are you willing to test this theory...?" Rikki questioned. Cleo remained silent. "Didn't think so." Rikki dramatically exited the moonpool, splashing everyone with her long tail as she swam out.

"What was that all about?" Hermione asked.

Bella answered her. "It's just that she's angry with Zane for some reason or another. She has a short temper to begin with and Cleo's problems were all it took to put her over the edge.

"Yes I realize that," Hermione said. "I meant with all those looks back there. Are you two keeping some sort of secret about telling parents or something?"

Cleo raised an eyebrow at Bella. Bella sighed, knowing she'd have to speak sooner or later. "I told my parents a while ago that I was a mermaid and that's all there is to it."

"No there's not." Cleo added. "If you ask her about it or anything

she clams right up. There's more to the story, Bella!"

"Okay, you're right. But you're never getting the rest out of me. The circumstances were way different for me than they are for you, so please just let it go."

"Just tell us 'the circumstances' and I will!"

"You just won't understand. Nobody would." Bella said.

"I'll let it go today, because I need to get to work in twenty minutes, but we're continuing this conversation tomorrow."

Bella glared at her. "You had better get going then. Ronnie is waiting."

"You are impossible!" Cleo huffed. "I'll see you later, Hermione," she said. She dipped her head into the water and disappeared. Bella and Hermione were left.

"Why are you holding out on them?" Hermione asked her.

"Why are you?" she retorted, surprising Hermione. "I know you're still keeping secrets too. I'm not trying to get you to spill or anything, I'm just saying some things are too weird or too frightening or too personal to share. You clearly know that."

"You're right," Hermione said, thinking. "If I tell them, will you?"

"I don't know what kinds of secrets you're keeping from them."

"It's a gamble on both our parts, but won't you feel better with them knowing? I know I will."

"How about...how about we tell each other first?"

"Right now?" Hermione asked. She wasn't prepared to tell at that very moment.

"No, not now. Tomorrow maybe?" Bella asked, half hoping she wouldn't agree to it.

"Sure. Your house? We can't properly talk with Cleo around." Hermione said, feeling nervous already.

"Um, alright. I'll see you tomorrow, okay?" Bella said.

"Yeah, of course," Hermione replied, already thinking about tomorrow. "I'm gonna go take a nap, if you don't mind me leaving you. I'm going to be up late tonight." She smiled, "Secrets, you know?"

"I'll be sure to ask about it tomorrow," Bella said. "Go ahead and leave, I need some time to myself anyways. I'm already freaking about telling my secrets. I haven't told in years."

"I'm totally the opposite. I've never gone this long with people who don't know about me," she paused, "But then again, I haven't had to tell them."

Bella laughed. "I understand completely. Maybe this isn't such a ridiculous plan after all." She rolled over onto her back and closed her eyes. "I'll see you tomorrow, Hermione."

"Bye, Bella," Hermione replied as she walked out of the moonpool, her steps echoing.

When Hermione woke up from her nap, it was 4:30. She pulled on a pair of jeans and a jacket because it was bound to be cold on the other side of the world. It was nearly winter in Hogsmeade. Cleo was still at the marine park, so she wasn't around to ask questions. Hermione wrote her a note, however reading:

Sorry, I'm not home. I found a Starbucks near here and decided to head there to do any required summer reading and video chat with Ron. There's a pretty big time difference and it's hard to work out the timing. Anyways, I'll be fine. Don't wait up for me, I'll probably be home late. See you in the morning!

Hermione

Satisfied, Hermione grabbed her purse and her wand, and Apparated to The Three Broomsticks where Ron was waiting.

She shook her head, momentarily disoriented, then glanced up to see her boyfriend. "Ron!" she shrieked jumping on him and wrapping her arms around her neck. "I missed you so much," she mumbled into his shoulder.

"I missed you too, Hermione," Ron said, setting her down and kissing her. "Bloody hell, I nearly forgot how good that was."

"Ronald!" Hermione squealed, shoving him away playfully.

"What?" he replied unabashed. "It's true."

Hermione rolled her eyes and laced her fingers with his. "C'mon, let's get a Butterbeer. I haven't had one in ages." She lead them to the door of the pub.

Ron graciously held it open and gestured for her to go first. "After you..." he said.

"Oh stop it," Hermione said giggling. "Where have these sudden manners come from?"

"It's the first time I've seen you in a month. Gryffindors are sorta like knights, right?"

"I suppose..."

"Then consider it chivalry." Ron said smiling.

Hermione grinned back at him. This day would be perfect, she thought as she looked around the familiar pub. It was warm and crowded in there, but in a good way. They took a seat at a table near the back. "And just where are the students today?"

"Learning. Old McGonagall let me take off to see you. I knew I always

liked her."

"That's awfully nice of her. Do you like teaching here?"

"Like it? I love it! This is the best job I could possibly ask for. Quidditch is one of my favorite things. I mean sometimes it's kind of weird teaching kids a year younger than I am, but I got over it. The only thing that could make my life better would be you living here. Seriously, it's great. How's Australia? Did you find the mysterious creature?"

"Oh it's beautiful there, Ron. I love it. And yes I found the creatures." she looked around and lowered her voice. "They're mermaids."

"But that's no fun. It's supposed to be a new species, isn't it?"

"Well they are. They're like mythical mermaids. Beautiful women on top, fish on the bottom. They only grow tails when they touch water too. Other than that, they're human. Actually, they're my best friends."

"Replacing me and Harry, are you?"

"No it's not like that! I only meant--"

"Relax, 'Mione, I was only joking."

"Don't do that Ron, you scared me! Anyways, they're seriously great girls. I don't want to move back just yet, I love living there with them."

"Do they know you're a witch?"

"Well I haven't exactly had the opportunity to tell them yet. I mean they will eventually, soon probably, I just don't know how they'll react."

"I'm sure they won't mind one bit."

"Not until I drag them off to the Ministry and run tests on them," Hermione said bitterly.

"It's for their own good. Once they have rights, they'll be under the protection of the Ministry."

"You're right," Hermione sighed. "Look enough about mermaids, let's talk about something else."

And with that, Ron and Hermione settled into a comfortable conversation for a solid two hours. When the time came for Hermione to go, they were both crushed.

When they broke from their long goodbye kiss, Hermione murmured "I can't wait another month to see you. Next weekend sound good?" She felt Ron nod and pulled away from his arms. "Maybe we could go to Madam Puddifoot's Tea Shop."

"Erm, I guess if that's what you want..." Ron responded.

"Kidding!" Hermione smiled. She kissed him again. "I love you, Ronald." she said.

"I love you too." He said. She hugged him for a long time, dreading leaving him.

Finally they broke their embrace. "Bye," Hermione whispered and she Apparated to Cleo's backyard. Unbeknownst to her, someone else was there as well.

10. Chapter 10

Hermione had only spent three hours in Britain, making it 8 o'clock pm when she returned to Cleo's house. Coincidentally, Bella had been heading to the same place. She was in the backyard because she swam to Cleo's, figuring nobody would see her in the dark. She was there to apologize to Cleo.

There was a large cracking sound as Hermione made it back to Australia. She took a moment to overcome her dizziness and looked around to make sure nobody had seen her. Someone had.

"You're a witch," Hermione heard someone say in a hushed tone behind her. She slowly turned around to face the accusation. She saw Bella standing there, her mouth agape.

"Uh yeah, hocus pocus, warts, cauldrons, all that," she laughed nervously, attempting to lighten the suddenly tense mood with a joke.

"No," Bella said slowly, "Broomsticks, wands..." she paused, "and Apparating."

"Who are you?" Hermione whispered, shocked.

"Just Bella."

"Okay. Still Bella," she laughed. "Got it. And you're a witch?"

Slowly Bella nodded. "Well yeah, I guess you could say that. I never quite got past second year so legally no, but yes, I do have magic."

"You didn't finish second year?"

"That was the year He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named returned. My family fled the country. So no, my dad's not into hotel management," she laughed bitterly. "But enough of that, I'll let my dad tell that story, it's really more his to tell. Would you like to come over?"

"Eh, sure," Hermione answered, confused.

"Do you want to Apparate?" Bella asked tentatively.

"Actually, I've got a bit of a headache. I just got back from Hogwarts," she smiled.

"Well then, let's just walk."

"Perfect," Hermione said. "So as you were saying...you're a witch? Did you go to a Wizarding school here in Australia? Hmm, what's it called, Bunyip or something?"

Bella laughed. "Bunyip? I've never heard of that. No, I went to Hogwarts, like you I suppose."

"But Hogwarts only accepts students from the UK."

"I am from the UK," Bella said with a slight Irish accent. Seeing the look on Hermione's face she continued, "And yeah, this is what I really sound like. I lived in Ireland from the time I was born, until I was twelve. The accent's not so prominent anymore because I've lived all over since. I can do Scottish, English, American, Canadian, South African, and, of course, Australian perfectly."

"But why go through all that trouble?"

"It's imperative that I fit in. Oh and in case you were wondering," she pointed to herself, "Hufflepuff. Hm, lemme guess. Ravenclaw?" she asked pointing to Hermione.

"Gryffindor, actually. But wait, before I go any further, what were those 'special circumstances' you've been keeping from us?"

"Well, I managed to keep the secret until I was twelve, so I suspect the Ministry doesn't know I exist, seeing as I learned about mermaids second year and none of the information mentioned a golden tail," she smiled. "But then, when I was twelve my family started moving around a lot. It was extremely important we knew everything about each other. I wasn't going to risk my parents lives for my silly little secret. Besides, they couldn't have cared much, I was already a witch. Cleo's family isn't magical and there aren't exactly Death Eaters going after her," she shuddered. "There's really no reason for her to tell. God, I wish my life were so simple that the only thing that kept me up at night was that my mummy didn't know I was weird," she grimaced. "Sorry, that was uncalled for."

"It's completely understandable. I was on the run for months this past year. Why we're you moving around so much?"

"We were targets for the Dark Lord. Not exactly the best position to be in."

"But why-"

"Oh look we're here," Bella interrupted. She smiled. "Don't be shy. Go on in."

"Do you want to go in and explain first or-" Hermione tried to ask.

"Just follow me," Bella cut in. "We'll be fine." She opened the door and walked in, Hermione walking cautiously behind her. "Mum? Dad?" she shouted. She motioned for Hermione to have a seat on the couch in the living room and sank down next to her. The room was big and open and decorated with nautical furniture. Her mum walked in first.

"Yes sweetie?" she asked.

"Mum, you know Hermione," Bella started.

"Well yeah, we've met, but we've never really had a decent chat have we, Hermione?" she responded. Hermione smiled apologetically and shook her head. "Why?"

"It turns out Hermione is a very interesting girl."

"How 'interesting'?" she asked warily.

"Hold on, let me get Dad first. Daaaaaad," she yelled again. This time he listened and padded into the living room.

"Yes?" he asked.

"Bella's just been telling me how interesting her new friend is," Bella's mum told him, filling him in.

"Interesting, hm? What exactly do you mean 'interesting'?"

"Do you wanna say it or should I?" Bella turned to Hermione.

"I will," she replied. "Mr. Hartley, Mrs. Hartley, I'm a witch."

"Oh, really? How peculiar that we are both in this little Australian town at the same time." Mr. Hartley said. "Please, tell us about yourself."

Hermione cleared her throat, confused. Why had she never heard the name Hartley before? She decided to answer their questions before she asked any of her own. "To start off, I am a Muggle-born. I had no idea that magic existed until I turned eleven. My parents," she laughed, "My parents are dentists. Anyways I went to Hogwarts and got sorted into Gryffindor. I worked really hard and earned the title 'the brightest witch of her age'. My two best friends are Harry and Ron. Ron also happens to be my boyfriend. I visited him this evening, actually...and I don't really know what else to say." She smiled nervously.

"Ron? Might that be Ronald Weasley?" Bella's father asked looking as if he were choking on something.

"Yes, why?"

"That's," he paused, "That's my nephew," he whispered.

"But sir, Ron only has one uncle, Uncle Billius. I mean there's Mrs. Weasley's brothers but they died," Hermione said, correcting him.

"One of them did. I managed to make it out alive. Allow me to introduce myself, I am Gideon Prewett," he said. That would make him Mrs. Weasley's brother. She remembered her maiden name was Prewett.

"Hello," Hermione said shyly. "I don't mean to be rude, but, how did you survive?"

"My brother sacrificed himself for me. The killing curse didn't work, but the Death Eaters didn't know that. I hid with my wife and eventually my daughter, too in Ireland. Eventually, though, our Secret-Keeper told and we've been running all over the world from You-Know-Who ever since."

"Wait," Hermione said, "Haven't you heard the good news?"

"Good news?" he asked.

"Voldemort's dead!"

"Don't say his name. It's sick to joke about such things," he said in a sharp tone.

"It's not a joke, sir." Hermione told him. "I fought in the battle myself. The sacrifices made that night..." she trailed off. "War should not be taken lightly. Voldemort's dead, my best friend killed him. You don't have to run anymore. You can go see Mrs. Weasley."

"How is she, Molly I mean?"

"Not so good. Fred died fighting Voldemort."

"A noble death."

"Anyways, sir, she really needs her brother right now."

"I-I can't believe this. No more running and hiding. I can see my sister. I can see Molly again!" he jumped up and hugged Hermione. "Thank you," he whispered. He then turned to Bella and his wife. "Pack your things, we're going on a trip!" he shouted joyously.

Bella smiled. "Can Hermione come?" she asked.

"You can invite whomever you want, darling," he replied. "We'll leave Friday!" He scooped up his wife in an embrace and proceeded to dance around the living room.

"I'll see you tomorrow then, Hermione?" Bella asked.

"Of course. Oh and nothing is going to keep me from coming," she answered with a grin. "Goodnight!"

When she made it back to Cleo's it was nearly eleven. She found an owl waiting for her so she quickly scribbled out a note to Ron, telling him to go to the Burrow for the weekend. Cleo was already fast asleep so Hermione climbed into her own bed and closed her eyes, eager to visit the Weasleys.

11. Chapter 11

The next day Hermione was sitting with Cleo and the rest of the Sertori family at the breakfast table when Sam knocked over a glass of orange juice. Unfortunately, it spilled all over Cleo, who was sitting right next to her. Cleo immediately stood up, knocking over

her chair and moving the table, causing all of their drinks to spill. She muttered "I've got to go," and sprinted down the hall.

"I'm sorry," Sam apologized to Hermione, "She's always doing that."

Kim sighed. "Why is my sister such a loser?"

"I'd better go check on her," Don said. He rose from his seat.

"Wait! Let me do it, please. No offense, but she won't want to talk to you guys," Hermione said before he went to find her. She flew down the hall to the bathroom. "Cleo," she shouted as she knocked on the door.

"Go away," she heard Cleo mutter.

"Cleo, it's Hermione."

"Oh, you scared me. Sorry, the door's locked."

"It's okay, I'll get it," Hermione told her. She looked around, making sure nobody had followed then took out her wand and muttered "Alohamora," under her breath. The lock clicked open and she stepped through the door, promptly closing it behind her.

"How did you...?" Cleo asked.

"Oh that?" Hermione laughed. "Just a little trick I picked up at boarding school."

"You'll have to teach me sometime," Cleo smiled.

At that, Hermione smirked. "We'll see. Anyways, enough about that, what about you, are you alright?"

Cleo gave her a sad smile. "I'm fine, you know. I just wish..."

"I'll help you with that if you want. Telling Sam I mean."

"But why would you do that?"

"Because I know how it feels to keep secrets from people you love."

"You mean those secrets you and Harry and Ron have?"

"How did you..."

"Oh come on, that comment you made when you first got here? Something about you guys going through things that made you super close? I totally felt that way with my mermaid secrets and Bella and Rikki. You're not normal, either."

"I...em..."

"Relax, you can tell me later. Right now we have bigger things to do. Like get me dried off?"

"Sorry, I totally forgot." She tossed Cleo a fluffy blue towel.

"Funny how you don't seem to notice we're complete freaks," Cleo looked at Hermione.

"I just don't find it too strange, that's all," Hermione answered. Cleo raised an eyebrow.

"Look, Cleo it's not that I don't trust you, it's just I don't know what to say."

"And that's fine. Totally fine. You'll tell me on your own time, I guess. Oh look, I'm all dry." She stood up and brushed off her hands. "I really appreciate you volunteering to help with Sam. So when should we do this?"

"Is next week okay with you?"

"Yeah, but why wait that long?"

"Actually, I was wondering if I could go on holiday with Bella for a week..."

"You're not supposed to leave the country, you know that."

"Yes, but she's going to visit Ron and his family. Apparently she's his cousin. I have to see him Cleo, it's been too long without him. You understand don't you? Remember how you felt when Lewis went away?"

Cleo just stared at her.

"I can see if you can come with...?" she added as a last attempt to get a yes. "You'll get to meet Harry and Ron and Ginny. Oh you'd love them, Cleo! Please say yes."

Cleo sighed. "Fine. If you really want to go that bad, who am I to stop you from seeing your friends? A trip to Britain sounds great, actually. When are we leaving?"

"Well we already bought plane tickets... Do you think you could get one on your own? We'll meet you there and take you to where we're staying." Hermione and the Prewetts would be traveling by Floo Powder, not by airplane, but Hermione did not want to include Cleo in those plans.

"Sure I'll go look right now. When are you leaving?"

"Friday."

"This Friday?" Cleo asked, her voice raising an octave.

"I know, I'm sorry. Look I better go tell Bella," she said as she placed her hand on the doorknob.

Cleo laughed. "And I better go pack. I'll see you later."

Hermione walked outside and Apparated to Bella's house. She tentatively knocked on the door, nervous about what they would say. She was greeted by Mr. Prewett.

"Good morning, Hermione. What brings you here? We weren't expecting you until noon."

"You know how you told Bella she could invite anyone..."

"Yes," he answered, prodding Hermione to continue.

"I invited our friend Cleo so she would allow me to go."

"That's fine. The more the merrier."

"The problem is, sir, she's a Muggle."

"If I remember correctly, she is a mermaid, or whatever it is those girls are. She's just as big a part of the magical community as we are. I see no problem in her coming, though Bella might be angry."

"It'll be okay?"

"Of course. I'll tell Bella if you wish."

"Thank you so much! I'll be back at noon." Hermione turned to leave.

"Hermione wait," Mr. Prewett said. "Are you telling her we're wizards, or hiding it?"

"I'll tell her eventually. Just not before this trip. She seems pretty stressed with her secrets right now, I don't want to pile ours on top. Is that alright?"

"That's perfectly fine. Goodbye, Hermione."

"Bye, Mr. Prewett." Hermione walked out the door and took her time getting home.

While this was going on, Cleo was in the moonpool, too stressed to pack. The pressure of her secret was building on her and she liked knowing that she could tell Sam, but setting a date for it felt too real. What if Sam was disgusted or worse, terrified of her? She wouldn't be able to live with herself.

And then there was Hermione. What was up with that girl? Cleo desperately wanted to know her secret, but didn't want to pry. This trip seemed like the perfect opportunity to find out more. Hermione was bound to slip up around her friends where she was comfortable. Cleo would come home knowing her secret, she promised herself, whether Hermione confessed or not.

A third thing was also bothering her. It was the reason she had feared water so much. Tomorrow was the anniversary of her best friend's tragic death. Cleo pushed this out of her mind. She couldn't take anything else when her head already felt like exploding. She brushed her hair out of her face and laid her head down in the crook of her arm. All the mysteries and secrets and lies in her life

suddenly hit her like a tsunami. She burst into tears and remained like that for a good ten minutes. Then she picked her head up, composed herself, and swam back home to pack.

12. Chapter 12

****Sorry this took so long in comparison to the other chapters. I've been out of town for a week. But don't worry I'm back with a brand-new chapter which also happens to be the longest chapter yet! This chapter resolves some things before the big trip. In the next chapter or so we'll be getting into the main plot. Enjoy!****

Cleo desperately needed a girls' day, that's what she kept telling herself. Thinking about her dead friend wouldn't help anything. The last thing she needed to do today was wallow in self-pity and grief. She talked to Sam about this and she suggested a beach day. Not wanting to ruin their relationship right before the big reveal when she returned home, she reluctantly agreed. She invited the other mermaids and Hermione. Lewis also weaseled his way into going after hearing what was going on.

That was why Cleo was currently traipsing down the worn path to Lewis's special fishing spot toting a picnic basket. She led the way, closely followed by her worried-looking boyfriend carrying a fishing pole and tackle box. Rikki and Bella were holding beach chairs and Rikki was not hiding how heavy it was. She stopped every thirty seconds or so to set it down in the sand, groan, roll her eyes, and pick it right back up. Hermione and Sam took up the rear, each pulling a cooler, so that the mermaids wouldn't get splashed. It'd be terrible if they got wet, but they were better off getting revealed to one person rather than the dozens of sunbathers on the public beach.

Once Cleo finally found a perfect spot, she pulled a worn blanket out of her basket and laid it down on the warm sand. Lewis didn't exactly agree with her placement of the blanket. In a hushed voice that ended up sounding more like a stage whisper he said, "Cleo don't you think that's a little close to, you know..."

"What Lewis? The water? Why, you afraid of it or something? Last time I checked, this is a Girls' Day Lewis. Where is your bikini, exactly?" she asked with her hand on her hip.

"I was just making a suggestion," he mumbled, pouting.

"Look, it's fine, I'm sorry I snapped at you. Why don't you just go on down to the water and catch a nice, big fish? Us girls will stay up here and eat lunch."

"Are you sure you don't want me to-"

"Go Lewis!" Rikki interrupted. He trudged down to the water with his fishing pole in hand. "Well, now that he's gone, who's up for a sandwich?" The girls and Sam laughed. "Could you hand me one, Cleo?"

"Sure," she said, tossing one to Rikki. It flew straight over her head. Cleo winced. "Sorry, I'm not exactly athletic."

"I've noticed," Rikki retorted as she reached behind her for her ham-and-cheese. She subtly heated it up as it sat in her lap before taking a bite. "This is a good sandwich," she managed to say in between bites.

Sam smiled. "Why thank you."

Cleo continued to pass out sandwiches. "Rikki, would you like something to drink?" Bella asked while opening the cooler.

"Yeah, just a water please." She turned back to her sandwich.

Bella opened up the cooler and rooted around in the ice for a bit before successfully finding a water bottle. She dried it off with a towel and handed it, along with a straw, to Rikki. "Here you go," she said smiling. Rikki took it, too engrossed with her sandwich to notice Bella's glistening hand.

Hermione had watched the whole thing go down. "How did you...?" she whispered.

Bella turned to face her and mouthed "Impervius."

Hermione's eyes widened. "That's brilliant."

"What's brilliant?" Cleo asked.

"Uh, those sandwiches. Brilliantly assembled, aren't they, Bella?" Bella nodded. "Could you pass me one?" Hermione said.

"Sure..." Cleo answered, confused. Hermione held out her hands, waiting to catch it, but Cleo handed it to her instead.

Once everyone had finished, Sam attempted to make conversation. "So, who's up for a swim?" Immediately, she was hit with a chorus of "no's." Bewildered, Sam asked "Well, why not?"

"Clearly I'm in desperate need of a tan," said Rikki gesturing to her pale body.

"Yeah, and I've been waiting to read this magazine for a while now..." offered Bella.

"And you know I hate water. It's, scary and, you know, wet," Cleo said. "Sorry, Sam."

"Hermione?"

"Well, I guess I could for a little while. Do you guys mind?" The three mermaids shook their heads. "Okay. Lead the way, I'll be right there." She watched as Sam headed down to the water. "You three gonna be alright?"

Rikki rolled her eyes. "I think we'll manage. Go bond with your adopted mummy."

Hermione stripped off her gray tank and denim shorts, revealing a purple bikini underneath. She set down the shorts on the blanket then balled up the shirt and threw it at Rikki's head. "Hey, watch it!" Rikki yelled. She threw it back sending her and Hermione into a fit

of laughter. "Glad someone has better aim than Cleo round here."

"I'm not that bad, am I?" Cleo asked them worriedly.

"Of course not, Cleo," Bella smiled. "You're worse."

"Cool, guys." Cleo laid back on her towel in a huff. She crossed her arms and put her earbuds in.

"Someone's a bit crabby today," Hermione said causing the other girls to laugh. "I better go, Sam's waiting," she said glancing at a head of curls bobbing in the waves. "Stay dry," she said mock-sternly, her hands on her hips. She walked down to the water, leaving footprints in the sand behind her.

Bella rolled over and shook Cleo. "Wake up..." she said in a sing-songy voice.

"What?" Cleo asked.

"Stop being so cranky, it's annoying," Rikki said.

Cleo's eyes narrowed, then she smiled. "Sorry, I guess Kim's rubbing off on me."

"Speaking of Kim, where is she today? I'm sure she would've loved to participate in our beach day." Bella said sarcastically.

"She's shopping with Dad."

"Your dad? Wouldn't she rather go with Sam?" Bella asked.

"Your dad's more likely to buy her stuff, am I right?" Rikki asked. She was lying on her back with her eyes closed, determined to tan instead of burn.

Cleo sighed. "Yep, it's ridiculous. Remember that sleepover we had at my house during the last full moon?" The girls nodded. "Kim convinced Dad and Sam to take her and her friends to an amusement park for the weekend."

"Wow, what a brat," Bella said, surprising Rikki and Cleo. Bella usually had nothing bad to say about people. Bella noticed the incredulous looks on their faces and said, "What? She totally is!"

"It's okay, Bella, we completely agree," Rikki said. She laughed. "Cleo, remember that time she found your little mermaid diary?"

"Rikki, that's not something to joke about!" Cleo said, playfully shoving her.

"Wait, I wanna hear about this," Bella said. Rikki complied, launching into the story, leaving out the parts involving Elliot and Emma to avoid an awkward situation. They had never really had the perfect opportunity to tell Bella about their best friend, so they just forgot about telling her completely.

By the time Rikki was wrapping up her account of what happened with "So the moral of the story is, don't keep a diary full of details on your biggest secret, or things will get messy," Sam and Hermione got back. Hermione was made sure not to get the girls wet by giving them a wide girth. Sam, however, was not so careful.

As Sam wrung out her hair with a towel, a single drop of water escaped. The girls watched it, in what seemed like slow motion, land on Cleo's thigh. Cleo was unaware of this happening until Rikki shoved her in the direction of the water and mouthed, "Go."

Cleo immediately tore down to the water. Lewis, seeing this, threw down his fishing pole and took off after her. Cleo resurfaced behind a large boulder in the water and, thirty seconds later watched Lewis come up next to her, gasping for air. "That's a far swim," he sputtered.

"Listen, if you're here to lecture me, don't bother. I realize I took a big risk coming here and I could've exposed us all. Doing that was wrong on my part. It's so irritating having to worry all the time."

"I just came to see if you're alright. I know you're already stressed out about Sam and I figured you be upset."

Cleo sighed. "I'm more frustrated than upset. I'd really just like to swim right back up to shore and get this whole thing over with..."

"But...?"

"But I can't, not now. I'd probably just scare her. Besides, Hermione offered to help tell her next week."

"Next week?"

"Well, actually, I'm going to be away this weekend..."

"Away where, exactly?"

"Just, you know, the UK."

"And you didn't think to tell me?"

"Well I just made the plans- Hold on, can we continue this conversation on this rock?" A portion of the boulder was carved out low to the water and hidden from view from the beach.

"Sure," he replied. Cleo hoisted herself up onto the rock, followed by Lewis.

"Where did they go?" Sam asked.

"My guess is they're on that rock," Bella said.

"Well we should probably go see what's going on..." Sam said, heading towards the waves.

"No, no, no you can't do that!" Rikki leapt into her path.

"Why not?" Sam asked slowly, crossing her arms.

"Well you see-" Bella started.

"She...erm-" Hermione tried to help with an explanation.

"You can't because..." Sam raised an eyebrow at Bella.

"Look, you just can't, alright?" Rikki interjected. "Truth is, Cleo doesn't want you over there. We aren't going to let you over there, okay?"

"We're sorry and everything...we just...you can't." Bella said, not wanting to anger Sam.

"That's a terrible reason. It's not even a reason at all, in fact. What is going on, girls?"

"Nothing. Nothing at all," Bella stammered. Rikki rolled her eyes at Bella's pathetic attempt at lying. She drew the attention back over to herself.

"Nothing important is going on Sam. It's just that you got some water on Cleo and-oof!" Bella had kicked her. "What the hell was that for?" Rikki hissed in her ear.

"Just stop talking! You're making it worse!" Bella whispered back.

"I got water on her and...?" Sam prodded.

"And she doesn't like when that happens. She's trying to get over her fear of water so she-"

"Ran into the ocean? Sorry girls but your story just doesn't make any sense." She sidestepped Rikki and continued walking towards the water.

"Wait!" Bella shouted after her. That got Sam's attention. She was used to Rikki being outspoken and Hermione being borderline bossy but Bella didn't usually voice her opinion like this. She turned around in the ankle-deep water she now stood in and walked back up to the sand. Bella casually took a step backwards, all too aware of the water dripping down Sam's ankles and landing in the sand. "Do you think you could just trust us with this? Please, for Cleo's sake. What she needs right now is Lewis, not us, not you. Don't go over there."

"Well alright," she said in defeat. The girls sighed, relieved. "However I will be expecting a legitimate explanation later. Please make sure to bring Cleo home straightaway," she said, eyeing Hermione. She took off down the path. "No explanation, no holiday, got it?" The three girls somberly nodded their heads.

"What 'holiday' is she talking about?" Rikki asked once Sam had left.

"Oh I completely forgot to invite you today," Bella said. "Would you like to come to Britain with us?"

Rikki sighed. "You know I don't have the money for that. And besides, I really need to patch things up with Zane. This time, it really is my fault and I need to fix it. Have fun, though."

"I'll fix everything between Sam and Hermione. "Worst comes to worst," her voice dropped down to a whisper, "Obliviate."

Bella nodded slowly.

"Huh?" Rikki asked.

"What?" Hermione said back, confusing Rikki. Rikki convinced herself she was hearing things and shook it off.

"Look I better get going," Rikki said heading towards the water. "Coming, Bella?" Bella nodded and followed.

"Send Cleo and Lewis back over, will you?" Rikki gave her a thumbs-up right before she dove into the waves.

Soon, Cleo washed up onto the beach dragging Lewis behind her. "Care to help me, Lewis?" Cleo asked. Lewis took hold of Cleo's arms and pulled her up to a dry bit of sand. "Least Rikki could've done was stick around to dry me off," Cleo grumbled.

"Cleo, she did the best she could do under the circumstances. She couldn't say you were hurt or scared or anything like that because Sam would've swam right over and saw your tail."

"I should probably go I've got some tests to run before the full moon tomorrow," Lewis said.

"Great, just what we need, more problems," Cleo said sarcastically. "Call me if you find out anything." Lewis bent down to kiss her before walking away.

"I'm sorry, Cleo, but I just don't see a way out of this one. Either you tell Sam you're a mermaid, or you stay home while the rest of us go on holiday. She's not going to let you go, not after today," Hermione while tossing Cleo a towel.

"What if she takes it poorly?"

"If she takes it poorly," Hermione said slowly, "I can fix it, but you'll have to trust me. Sam's not going to take it poorly, though. She's going to be fine with the whole thing like I am, like Lewis is, and Zane and Will. It'll be fine."

"Okay, okay. I'll do it. I'll tell her. Will you stay with me, though? For support?"

"Of course. Now hurry up and get your legs back so we can walk home."

Cleo stepped tentatively through her door. "Sam?" she said hesitantly, not ready to face her.

She saw Sam at the top of the stairs holding a basket of clothes. "What is it?"

"You're not busy are you?"

"Not terribly."

"Good, then I have something I really need to talk to you about. Do you want to go sit in the kitchen?"

"Okay. Might this be your explanation for what happened today?"

"Yes, and trust me, this is a huge deal. Do you want to come, Hermione?" she asked with a pleading look in her eyes. Hermione nodded then followed. "Um, so, have a seat." She winced as Sam's chair made a loud squeaking chair as she pulled it across the tile.

"Alright. I'm just going to start by saying that you can't say a word about this to anyone, got it?" Sam nodded, thinking she knew where the conversation was going. "If word got out about me..." she shuddered. "Sam, I'm-"

"You don't have to say it Cleo. You're pregnant aren't you? You have been acting strange lately, and Lewis seems to know what's been going on with you. Don't worry, sweetie, I won't tell. I can help you with this," she smiled a painful smile. "Although I don't see how this explains your behavior today..." she added thoughtfully.

Hermione burst out into laughter. "Oh, is teen pregnancy a laughing matter where you come from?" Sam said angrily. "How could you possibly see this as funny?"

"You seriously think I'm pregnant? Sam I am definitely not pregnant. Not even close."

"Then what is it you're trying to tell me?"

"Well the day at the beach does have something to do with it. You see I was hiding something and Lewis just came to see if I was alright."

"What were you hiding, Cleo?"

"My," she hesitated, "My tail. I'm a mermaid, Sam."

"Those aren't real."

"Remember yesterday how you were saying you'd believe in mermaids if you had proof? Well, here I am. Living, breathing proof."

"But you're just a normal teenage girl. Normal teenage human."

"No I'm not. Do you mind if I show you?"

Sam took a deep breath, then nodded slowly. "I suppose it wouldn't hurt. Where shall we go," she said, "The beach?"

"That's not necessary. Unfortunately one drop of water is all it takes. Hermione?" Hermione nodded her head at Cleo. She made her way over to the sink where she filled a cup with water.

"Do you want to move to the floor?" She asked Cleo. "I don't want you falling and getting injured." She smiled, "Lewis wouldn't be too happy with me."

"Good idea," Cleo replied as casually as possible, although her voice was trembling. She stood up, pushed in her chair, and sat on the floor. "I'll take that," she said gesturing to the cup. Hermione handed it to her. Cleo was squeezing it so hard out of nervousness that her knuckles were turning white. "Now don't be too concerned when nothing happens," she told Sam smiling, "The tail takes a few seconds." She dipped her hand in the water and set the cup on the floor.

"Ten, nine, eight-" Hermione counted.

"Oh, stop it!" Cleo playfully protested. They could see Sam continue to count down silently.

A second after Sam mouthed the word one, Cleo's two perfectly toned legs turned into a long bronze fin. Her clothes had disappeared as if by magic and a scaly bra covered her chest. Each individual scale glimmered under the fluorescent kitchen lights.

"How?" Sam whispered.

"It's sort of a long story," Cleo smiled apologetically.

"And just when did your father plan on telling me this?" she asked angrily. She searched Cleo's face and her expression softened. "He doesn't know does he?" Cleo shook her head. "Well who does?"

"Hermione, Lewis, Bella, and Rikki. And now you."

"And how much longer will it be before Kim becomes one too?"

"Kim?" Cleo asked with a puzzled look on her face. All of a sudden she started giggling. "Never if I can help it. It's not some kind of genetic disorder or anything like that. I mean relatives of mermaids are more powerful than say me, for example, but they weren't born to be part fish."

"Could you just give me an idea of how you became this way, then?"

"Basically if you're at the right place at the right time, magical things happen."

Sam bit her lip and nodded. "Okay, you can trust me."

"That's it?"

"That's it. Regardless of your parentage, I consider you my daughter and I will protect my children until the day I die. Don't worry, Cleo, I'll take care of you."

"Come here," Cleo said with her arms outstretched. Sam knelt down next to her slowly, all the while staring at her tail. Cleo hugged her. "Thank you," she whispered into her shoulder. They pulled apart. "You can touch it if you want," Cleo laughed. She guided Sam's hand

over her scaly fin.

"This is utterly ridiculous," Sam laughed. She pulled her hand away as the tail turned back into legs. "Woah, that'll never get old."

Cleo stood up and brushed off her hands. "Does this mean I can go with Bella on holiday?"

"Is that what all of this is about?" Sam laughed. She searched Hermione's hopeful face. "Fine, I suppose this is a pretty good explanation for what happened today."

Cleo squealed and ran over to hug Hermione. "Hermione, we're going," she exclaimed as she bounced up and down. "Thank you, thank you, thank you!" she embraced Sam.

"You're welcome," Sam said, rolling her eyes.

Cleo's voice became serious. "I mean it," she said, "Thank you for understanding."

"You don't have to worry about me keeping this, Cleo. Go have a great time with Hermione and Bella tomorrow."

"Love you, Sam," Cleo yelled as she skipped out of the room.

"You'll keep her safe, won't you?" Sam turned to Hermione.

"Of course," Hermione responded.

"There's more of them aren't there? She made it sound like there were."

Hermione bit her lip and nodded slowly. "Yes, there are others but I can't..." she trailed off.

"That's okay, I just wanted to make sure she's not alone in this."

"Even if there weren't, she's definitely not alone."

"You're an amazing friend to her."

"She's an amazing friend to me," Hermione laughed.

"Well you better be getting ready, too. Thanks Hermione, I really appreciate it."

"No problem," Hermione said as she exited the kitchen.

13. Chapter 13

At 1 o'clock exactly Hermione stepped out of the Weasleys' fireplace. Mrs. Weasley was waiting for her- Hermione had sent her a letter the day before.

"Hermione," she smiled and ran over to give her a hug, her eyes watering. "Darling, I've missed you. How's Australia? Is your

investigation going well? Have you been getting enough to eat with the family you're staying with? Here come into the kitchen and have some tea. I just made it. You can fill me in while you eat something. You look awfully thin."

Hermione smiled and followed her. She didn't realize how much she had missed the plump, motherly figure that was Mrs. Weasley. "Actually, Mrs. Weasley, I wanted to talk to you about something..."

"Yes, what is it dear?"

She paused hesitantly and lost her confidence, fearing Mrs. Weasley's reaction. "How has Crookshanks been while I was gone?"

"Oh, the cat? He's been fine. I think he actually managed to put on some weight, unlike you," she said eyeing Hermione's slender figure. Hermione smiled sheepishly. "Here, come sit."

"Actually I-" Hermione started. Mrs. Weasley silenced her with a look. Hermione slowly sat down.

"Yes?"

"You might want to have a seat, too."

"That bad?" Mrs. Weasley joked, but she complied, taking a seat opposite Hermione.

"I just really need to ask you something..." Hermione studied the worn wooden table intently, studying the scratches and dents, and tracing her finger over them envisioning the events that had caused them to be there. A ragged hole had clearly been caused by the twins testing out their Wildfire Whizbangs and the mark to the right of it had to have been made by a teething baby, possibly Ginny.

"What is it, dear?" Mrs. Weasley asked, snapping Hermione back to reality.

"Could you tell me what happened to your brother, Gideon?"

"Well, I don't really like to talk about him..."

"Yes I've noticed. It's just that, well, I met a man in Australia and he claims to be your brother."

She gasped. "But that's impossible. I don't know why somebody would impersonate Gideon but it's sickening to think about," she teared up. "Not a day has gone by that I haven't thought about my brothers," she continued in a hushed tone. "I miss them so much. I named Fred and George after them you know. Fred was named after Fabian and George after Gideon. I never suspected Fred would die like them. Just thinking about them is unbearable at times." She started crying silently. "Could you excuse me for a moment?" Hermione nodded silently. She exited the cluttered kitchen and walked up the stairs. Hermione heard a door slam.

Hermione stayed downstairs and wandered around, stopping to look at pictures of the boys in their youth, smiling and waving at the camera. One picture of toothless twins racing around on a broomstick nearly caused her to cry. Before the tears could spill over, however,

she was startled by Gideon stumbling of the fireplace.

"Molly?" he yelled, his heavy voice echoing off the cluttered walls of The Burrow.

Meanwhile Cleo was boarding her flight to London. She took a deep breath as she stepped on the plane. 21 hours and she'd be in London. She was already feeling claustrophobic as she maneuvered her way through the narrow aisle.

Cleo was the first person in her row to take her seat so she put her belongings away and got comfortable in the seat by the window. She sighed, put her earbuds in, and laid back eager for the ride to be over.

Just as she finally had relaxed, she found her self jostled back into the present by the person sitting next to her. Cleo looked up and smiled politely at the lady who would be accompanying her for the long flight. She was an elderly woman wearing flowy clothing. Her face was masked by sunglasses and her hair was hidden underneath a scarf.

"Hello," the woman said. She sounded familiar to Cleo.

"Hi," Cleo responded.

"How are you?" the lady asked. Cleo studied her voice then suddenly realized who it was.

"Ms. Chatham?"

"Hello, Cleo," she said smiling as she pulled off her sunglasses. "How have you been? I haven't seen you in ages."

"I'm doing well. Where have you been? Rikki and I have been wondering about you for a year now!"

"Oh, I've been around. I've still been watching out for you. I know Emma's gone and you have two new friends," she continued in a hushed tone, "one of which is a mermaid," she winked. She searched her bag for a glasses case.

"Well, yeah," Cleo said, taken aback. "Listen, about Bella. Why didn't you tell us there was another moonpool?"

"It wasn't exactly relevant, now was it?" she asked, looking up from her purse.

"No but it would've been nice to know," Cleo huffed. Then an idea came to her. If she knew about Bella's secret, maybe she could tell her more about Hermione.

"What do you know about Hermione?"

"She seems to be a wonderful friend to you girls, keeping your secret and such," she laughed. "Almost as good for you three as Lewis is. He's great with the scientific aspect of things, whereas she's knowledgeable about the magical part of it all." Cleo rolled her eyes at the mention of Hermione and magic. Clearly Ms. Chatham was wrong.

"And her secret...?"

"Yes I know what she is hiding, but it is not my place to tell you." She got a far off look in her eyes. "Funny how magic always seems to find itself..."

Magic, Cleo thought. It wasn't possible. Hermione never acted any other way but normal. She seemed especially tolerant and was a bit guarded but that wasn't enough to brand her magical. "Hermione's normal, though," she protested.

"Yes, yes. Whatever you say dear," Ms. Chatham agreed absentmindedly.

Cleo was suddenly suspicious. "Wait, how did you know all that? I mean I know you've been watching us, but you couldn't have learned all that about Hermione just by observing her. I've been trying for a while now."

Ms. Chatham shrugged. "I'm a Seer," she said mysteriously, as she played with the ends of her hair.

"Whaa-"

Ms. Chatham cut her off. "So what are you going to London for?"

This utterly confused Cleo. "I'm going to visit Bella's family which just so happens to be Hermione's boyfriend's family." Noticing how bizarre that sounded she added, "I don't really get it either." She then realized Ms. Chatham had completely changed the subject. "But that doesn't matter. What is a Seer?"

Ms. Chatham ignored her question. "It sounds like you'll have a great time. The Weasleys are great people. I'm going to London to visit a dear old friend of mine. She invited me to stay with her for a month or so. I think it'll be great, don't you?"

"Well, yeah, but I don't understand what this has to do with you being a 'Seer' or whatever."

"What on earth are you talking about, Cleo?" She craned her neck, looking for someone. "Have you seen any flight attendants? I'm parched."

Cleo shook her head, at a complete loss for words. Her mind was going mile a minute.

"I had better go look for one myself then. I'll be back later." Ms. Chatham rose and headed towards the rear of the plane.

Cleo was left alone with her thoughts. Who was Hermione? She had proven herself dependable and trustworthy, a great friend for the mermaids, but how big was her secret? Cleo hadn't thought it could be so bad and had believed Hermione was blowing it out of proportion, but now she wasn't so sure. She realized how little she knew about Hermione. Could she really be magical like Ms. Chatham had suggested? Cleo shook the thought out of her head. That lady had always been a little bit strange. She was also very vague and often spoke in riddles. Maybe "magic" was code for something else. Intelligence,

maybe? Feeling herself more confused then before, Cleo decided to give up and nap instead.

Back at the Burrow, Mrs. Weasley was an emotional wreck. She had slowly walked down the stairs fearing the worst, to find none other than her brother standing in her living room.

"Hi," Gideon said softly. Mrs. Weasley flew to his side. She looked up into his eyes and cupped his face in her hands.

"It really is you," she whispered. She pulled him into an embrace. "Oh, Gideon," she murmured into his shoulder, "You don't know how hard it's been thinking you were dead."

"At least you had closure," Gideon smiled sadly. "I had to live everyday knowing that you believed me to be dead. It was pretty tough. It was one of the best days of my life the other day when Hermione here told me You-Know-Who had been killed, making me a free man. The first thing I could think to do was come see my favorite sister."

Mrs. Weasley laughed. Her eyes were full of tears. "I'm your only sister," she said.

"You're still the best," Gideon said with a twinkle in his eye. Hermione smiled to herself as she watched their reunion from the doorway.

"Hermione and I were having tea if you'd like to join us," Mrs. Weasley offered.

"That sounds brilliant at the moment, however I was wondering if perhaps you'd like to meet my family."

"You've got a family now?"

Gideon nodded and smiled. "They'll be here any moment now if that's alright with you."

Mrs. Weasley just nodded, at a loss for words. Her brother was all grown up, and even better- alive.

"Okay so my wife's name is Clara. I met her shortly after I 'died'. I'll save that story for when she arrives. We have a daughter as well. Her name is Bella and she's the most wonderful thing in the world."

"They sound great," Mrs. Weasley said, slightly flustered. She hadn't had time to prepare for her guests like she usually did.

"Good," Gideon said patiently. He knew how his sister was when it came to guests.

"And they'll be here when?"

Just then the fireplace glowed green and Bella stepped out. "Now I suppose," Gideon grinned.

"Bella!" Hermione squealed, ran over and hugged her. "What took you so long?" she laughed.

Bella rolled her eyes. "I haven't seen you in what, twenty minutes?" She turned to Mrs. Weasley. "Hello, I'm Bella."

"Hi," she replied, staring at Bella. "Um, sorry," she smiled nervously. "It's nice to meet you."

The fireplace glowed once more and Clara appeared. She walked forward and took Gideon's hand.

"Molly, this is my wife, Clara," he said. "Clara, this is Molly."

"I've heard so much about you," Clara said.

"Really?" Mrs. Weasley smiled at her brother. She then faced Hermione. "Hermione, darling, would you mind showing Bella around?"

"Not at all." Hermione obliged, taking Bella's hand and leading her out of the room.

That night, over a dinner that somehow Mrs. Weasley had found the time to prepare, Hermione brought up Cleo. She explained how Cleo was a part of her host family, and was also her and Bella's best friend. She was in desperate need of a holiday so Hermione and Bella couldn't leave her in Australia.

"So is it alright if she stays here?" Hermione asked.

"I don't see why not," Mrs. Weasley said, happy to have more people to look after. "Is that fine with you, Arthur?" She asked her husband.

Mr. Weasley just nodded, utterly confused by the whole day. He had arrived home from work to see Hermione, Molly's deceased brother, and two complete strangers sitting in his kitchen. At that point, he would have said yes to anything.

"Aren't you forgetting something?" Bella prodded as she reached for another roll.

"Oh yes. Thing is, Cleo's sort of a Muggle."

"Sort of?" Mrs. Weasley asked inquisitively.

"Well--"

"She's magical, like me, but she doesn't know about any other type of magic except for her own."

"And what would that be?"

"I, well, I don't know exactly. I'm a witch, yes, but I'm also some sort of mermaid creature, which is what Cleo is. I could show you later, if you really want."

"Oh? Are they what you were looking for, Hermione?" Mrs. Weasley asked.

"Looking for?" Bella asked.

"Tell you later," Hermione said. "Yes, Mrs. Weasley, they are. Do you think you could find a way to make your house less," she paused, searching for a word, "Magical-looking?"

"I believe I know a charm or two," Gideon smiled. "We've been living around Muggles for a while."

"Brilliant! We could even sleep outside in tents if you'd like in case they wear off overnight."

"Alright, if you want," Mrs. Weasley said. "Just watch out for gnomes."

"Cleo will arrive in London at ten tomorrow morning. Mr. Weasley, could you borrow a car from the Ministry to drive here in? Possibly one that can drive itself, seeing as you don't have a driver's license?"

"Yes, I think I can arrange for that. I'm sure I'll be able to take off work as well. Will you just be Apparating there?"

"Yes, I'll meet her as she picks up her luggage and we'll meet you out front. I've researched it and it's about a two hour ride from London to the Burrow."

"That sounds perfect, Hermione," Mrs. Weasley said. "I'll send letters to everyone informing them that you're over. Perhaps they'll all come home for the weekend."

"Thank you so much, Mrs. Weasley," Hermione stood up and ran around the table to give her a hug. "You're the best."

Mrs. Weasley brushed it off. "Oh, don't be silly. You know I enjoy it."

14. Chapter 14

**Okay so I felt really bad that I made you guys wait so long, so to make it up to you, I wrote this one super-quickly so there was like a one (or two) day wait between chapters. Yay! So here you go :)
**

The next morning Mr. Weasley rose early to get to the Ministry. He figured he could work for a couple of hours or so before it came time to drive Hermione and her friend to the Burrow. Hermione, who had stayed in Ginny's room along with Bella, could hear him and Mrs. Weasley downstairs and decided to join them.

Mrs. Weasley glanced up from her eggs to see Hermione descending the stairs. "Good morning," she said cheerfully.

Hermione rubbed her face. "Good morning," she replied groggily.

"Would you like something to eat?" Mrs. Weasley asked.

"That'd be nice, thank you."

In a matter of a minute, Mrs. Weasley whipped up breakfast for Hermione, with the help of some magic. Watching the various cooking utensils spin around was both intriguing and dizzying to Hermione. She set the plate in front of an empty seat, then returned to her own. Hermione sat down by her food.

"So Hermione, Arthur was just telling me how he has found the perfect car to drive everybody in, right Arthur?"

Mr. Weasley nodded, excited. "It can drive itself and everything but looks completely Muggle. It even has a wheely-steer and gas and broke pedals!"

Hermione smiled silently to herself. "That sounds perfect, are we allowed to use it?"

"Of course," he puffed out his chest, "I've become rather important down at the Ministry, you know."

Mrs. Weasley patted his hand. "Yes, we're all very proud of him," she said patiently.

"What are your plans for today, Mrs. Weasley?" Hermione asked.

"Gideon, Clara, Bella, and I are also headed to London today, only we're going to Diagon Alley. Clara's a Muggle and has never been, even to get Bella's school supplies. We'll probably just go for an ice cream or something."

"That sounds really fun, I'm sure Bella will enjoy it."

"I hope so. Harry and Ginny might meet us there, too."

"Harry?"

"Yes, be sure to be home by one, Harry, Ginny, Ron, and George are all coming over for the weekend. Percy might even show up for dinner."

"That sounds brilliant, Mrs. Weasley. Has anyone ever told you how amazing you are?" Hermione asked with a grin.

"I try to, but she just won't listen," Mr. Weasley teased. He rose and kissed her on the cheek. "I've better be off to work." He headed towards the fireplace. "I'll see you at ten, Hermione," he called before he stepped into the green flames.

Hermione turned her attention back to Mrs. Weasley. "So will we be staying in tents?" she asked smiling.

"Yes if that's alright. I've got two, one for the boys and one for the girls. You girls are going to need a muggle tent, though, aren't you."

Hermione grimaced. "Unfortunately."

"Well maybe I can squeeze you or Ginny in with Harry and Ron. I think

Percy and George will just stay in their rooms. They aren't very big campers, Percy in particular. I'll ask George, though. Perhaps I'm wrong."

"Alright, that sounds good."

"And don't worry, I'll have Gideon muggle-fy the house before you get here."

"Thank you, Mrs. Weasley. You're the best!"

"Oh, stop it," she laughed.

"I'm going to go see if Bella is up, then. Thanks for breakfast." Hermione cleared her plate and headed up the stairs.

Three hours later Cleo pulled her suitcase off the carousel and turned around to find herself face-to-face with Hermione.

"You're here!" Hermione squealed.

"I know!" Cleo set down her suitcase and hugged Hermione.

"C'mon," Hermione gestured to the door, "I can't wait to get back and show you around."

"This is so exciting," Cleo said as she pulled her suitcase across the airport floor. "I've never been out of the country."

"Oh, you're going to love it here. You're going to meet Ron and Harry and Ginny. It's going to be great!"

"They're all here?" Cleo asked, nervous about meeting Hermione's friends. They had made it out the doors and Hermione was now searching for someone as they stood on the sidewalk.

"They'll be arriving at about the same time as us," Hermione said, visibly distracted. "Oh, and we'll be sleeping outside if you don't mind."

Outside? Cleo scrunched up her face in confusion. Hermione noticed her bewildered expression.

"There's going to be a lot of people there and I offered to stay outside in tents. It'll be an adventure, don't you love camping?"

"Last time I went camping my worst enemy almost turned into a mermaid," Cleo said in a monotone voice.

"Great, it'll be- wait what?"

Cleo laughed. "Never mind, it doesn't matter. Camping will be fun."

Hermione then found what she was looking for. "Look Mr. Weasley's here. Here, follow me," she paused. "Oh, and I want to hear more about that enemy of yours later."

Cleo laughed, "Alright."

Mr. Weasley pulled up in the inconspicuous black car borrowed from the Ministry. He squealed to a stop then laid on the horn to get the girls attention until Hermione started beating on the window to get him to stop.

Mr. Weasley opened the door with a grin on his face. "Hi girls," he said.

"Hello," Hermione responded. "Mr. Weasley, this is Cleo. Cleo, this is Mr. Weasley."

"Nice to meet you," he said.

"Likewise," Cleo said. "Thank you for letting me stay with you."

"Oh, it's no trouble at all, really. We love company."

"I hate to interrupt," Hermione said, "But you really shouldn't be parked here. C'mon, in the car." She pushed Cleo and Mr. Weasley in the direction of the car and got in herself after putting Cleo's suitcase in the back.

Cleo took an instant liking to Mr. Weasley. He was funny, nice, and a bit strange. His red hair seemed to only enhance all of his characteristics. She was yanked out of her thoughts as the car suddenly lurched forward.

"Sorry, sorry," Mr. Weasley called out. The girls laughed in response.

Five minutes after they pulled out into the busy London streets Cleo was deep in her thoughts about Hermione. Ms. Chatham had left her even more confused and this trip was her time for answers. Hermione was in her own element, she was bound to slip up. Before she could ask Hermione anything, though, Hermione struck up a conversation herself.

"So how was your flight?"

"Fine, it was sort of strange. An old friend happened to be going to London too. She seemed to know a lot about you."

"Like what?" Cleo could tell she was struggling to keep her voice casual.

"She wouldn't say," Cleo said slowly. She watched as Hermione sighed in relief. "I was hoping maybe we could talk, though." She said hopefully.

"I don't know if I can, Cleo. I'll try my best though. But first, tell me how's it's been back in Australia."

"You were only gone a day before me..."

"I just wanted to know how Sam was doing," Hermione said defensively.

"Oh, sorry. Yeah, she's doing well. She has to remind herself a lot

but she's been a big help. She even took over on the dishes for me," Cleo smiled. "Kim's not too happy about me getting out of it but Dad hasn't said anything so far."

"So no more complaining out of you?"

"I'm not that bad, am I?" Hermione's silence was all the answer Cleo needed for her question.

"Sorry," Cleo muttered. Hermione pulled her over so that she was resting on her shoulder.

"Don't be," she said back.

"Can he hear us?" Cleo whispered.

"No, besides he's not paying any mind to us anyways. He's too excited driving, he doesn't get to often." She turned to face Cleo.

"Why?"

"I just complain about little things like that to hide any real problems I have," she said softly. She didn't know why she was revealing this to Hermione, but it felt good saying so.

"Problems?" Hermione asked.

"Yeah, like my mum leaving us or my friend dying..."

"You've never said anything about either to me."

"I've never said anything about either to anyone." She took a deep breath. "It's just really hard losing people you care about. I loved them both and they were ripped from my life."

She turned to see Hermione patiently waiting for her to continue. "My mum and I were so close. I told her everything, except that I was a mermaid. If I had told her, maybe she would've stayed. I don't understand how she could just leave. I mean Sam's great and all but it hurts knowing your own mother doesn't want you."

"And your friend?"

"That's the reason I used to fear water so much. My friend, Sarah, and I were the best of friends. We lived next door to each other and attended the same primary school. We loved all the same things: dolls and swimming and the color pink. We used to go down to the beach and pretend we were," she paused, "Pretend we were mermaids. How ironic is that? Anyways one day we went down to the beach as usual and swam. The problem was the waves were bigger that day. Sarah got caught in a riptide and drowned. She was just six. After that we moved away to try and get me to feel better after months of therapy didn't work, but nothing could get me back in the water. Until, of course, I became a real-life mermaid." She started crying quietly. "I don't mean to complain all the time, it's just my way of protecting myself." She turned to see a strange look on Hermione's face. "Look, I don't expect you to understand, but-"

"No I completely understand," Hermione cut her off.

"But how? You've got a great life with a family that cares about you

here, not to mention your great boyfriend and amazing friends you keep talking about. I never told any of you about this because you guys don't know what this is like."

"I know exactly what it's like and Bella and Rikki haven't exactly had it easy, either."

"What are you talking about?"

"Rikki's mother left her father to raise her in a caravan park. And Bella- well you'll have to ask her yourself."

"And as for you...?"

"What is it that you want to know? That my parents don't even know who I am? That a half dozen of my loved ones lost their lives fighting a war that I managed to survive? What do you want me to say? Not everyone is as perfect as you seem to think."

"I'm sorry," Cleo whispered.

"Me too," Hermione whispered back.

"I really had no idea..."

"It's okay, I never let on that there was anything wrong with me. It's not your fault you're not a mind reader."

Cleo giggled. She nestled her head into the crook of Hermione's arm. "I wouldn't mind hearing about any of it if you wanted to talk." She felt awful after accusing Hermione of not being able to understand. She also felt guilty for underestimating Rikki and Bella.

"Well..." Cleo watched as Hermione contemplated her offer. "Alright, but it's sort of a long story."

"How long?"

"Very long, but I'll try. It's a long ride home. Where shall I start?"

"Your parents not knowing you."

Hermione grimaced. "I should not have said that." She suddenly smiled and muttered "God, I sound like Hagrid."

"Hagrid?"

"Never mind. Anyways, I'm not going any farther on that subject. They don't know me, which is totally my fault so I shouldn't be complaining, and I'm not going to say anything else."

"Then do you have adoptive parents? I mean by your parents you mean your biological ones, right?"

"No I'm not adopted, though I have been staying with the Weasley's for the past couple months. Look, I really can't talk about it. Any totally different questions?"

Cleo was confused. Hermione had no parents at all? It didn't make any

sense. She figured she still wasn't getting the whole truth and had to settle for the edited version.

"Um, you fought in a war?"

"Yes, it was more of a battle really."

"What were the sides?"

"Good versus evil. I fought for good. It was difficult but good won. Good always finds a way to win, doesn't it?"

"What was the war over in the first place?" Cleo asked.

She watched Hermione struggling to answer. "There was this," she paused searching for a word, "Man. An evil man who could kill anyone he desired. Once he decided he wanted you dead it was over. He was dangerous and ruthless and terrible. You could compare him to Hitler even. There was this little boy, only one year old at the time, who he saw as a threat to him so he went to kill him. He killed his mother and father for trying to protect their son, but when he went to murder the boy, he couldn't. He tried for the next seventeen years to kill the boy and he could never manage to. The battle took place because he had us surrounded. He wanted us to give us the boy but we refused and fought instead."

"And the man?"

"The boy killed him."

"How?"

"There was nothing left to fight but a shell of a man deformed by hatred with a weapon that did not belong to him."

"Oh."

"Yeah, 'oh'."

They sat in silence. Eventually Cleo broke the silence.

"Hermione?"

"Hm?"

"Will you tell me more sometime? The unedited version?"

"Unedited?" She laughed. "Alright we'll see."

"Okay. Hermione?"

"Yes, Cleo?"

"I'm going to go to sleep now. Will you wake me up when we get there?"

"Sure."

Cleo closed her eyes and drifted off to sleep.

15. Chapter 15

****Hey guys! So I've got good news and bad news... Good news is here's a new extra-long (for me at least) chapter! Bad news is this wait probably isn't even that bad compared to what's to come. See I start school Wednesday (crazy early, I know) and I'm going to have a _ton _of schoolwork by approximately Thursday. I wish I was kidding. I'll try to keep updating as soon as possible, though. Oh and I love you guys! Enjoy :) ****

"Cleo, Cleeeeeeo," Hermione gently shook Cleo.

"Mmm," she protested.

"Cleo, wake up we're here."

That was the only phrase that could've woken Cleo up out of her slumber at that point. She had been dreaming of Hermione riding a unicorn through a battle scene. Still groggy, Cleo asked, "Hermione, have you ever ridden a unicorn."

"Don't be silly," Hermione answered, "Unicorns aren't domesticated."

Cleo giggled. "You know, it's times like this when I get confused over whether or not you're kidding." Hermione made no sense. She opened her eyes to find they were parked in front of an disproportional sort of house. It was tall and crooked and seemed to be held together by sheer will. "Cute," Cleo mumbled.

"Isn't it?" Hermione grinned. Cleo could tell she loved it here. "We call it the Burrow. Um, okay you just wait here for a moment while I go see if they're home."

"Sure." Cleo agreed. Her thoughts when back to the unicorn. Was Hermione being serious? She knew she was being ridiculous but in this strange setting out front of a place held together by magic, believing was easy.

"Alright," Hermione said. "We're all good to go inside. Here I'll take your things to the tent out back." Hermione tugged out a suitcase from the rear of the car.

"I'll just come with you," Cleo suggested, not wanting to walk into a house full of strangers alone.

"Okay then, the tent is around back, follow me." Hermione walked around the house, right at home at the Weasleys' while Cleo followed suit, tripping and stumbling as she gaped at the structure.

"Here we are," Hermione tossed Cleo's luggage inside a huge tent that could easily sleep ten.

"That's a nice tent," Cleo remarked. "Who's is that?" She asked, noticing a smaller tent nearby. It was little and ugly. Cleo pitied the people that would be staying in there.

"That's the boys tent," Hermione explained.

"Oh, that's too bad that they get that tiny tent. Isn't there room for them to stay with us?"

Hermione giggled. "There is, but they like that tent just fine."

Cleo shrugged. "Alright. Time to meet your friends?"

"Yeah, here come inside." Hermione went in through the back door. Cleo stepped through behind her.

"This might take a minute. It's hard to get everyone's attention," Hermione told Cleo.

"Alright, everybody listen up," Hermione shouted. Everyone just kept chattering away. "Guys!" She tried again. "You guys, I need to say something!"

One person noticed she was struggling and came to the rescue. "Everyone, shut it!" A roomful of people turned around to glare at him. "Hermione wanted your attention, but you were rudely talking over her. Hermione?"

Hermione blushed. "Er, thanks Ron. Alright everyone, this is Cleo, mine and Bella's friend from Australia."

"Hi," Cleo smiled tentatively. She relieved a chorus of "hi's" in return.

"Cleo, this is, as you can probably guess, Ron," she nodded towards the boy who had stood up for her.

"Right," Cleo said, "Your boyfriend." Ron grinned back.

"Moving on," Hermione butted in. "This is Mrs. Weasley," she pointed to a motherly woman who also had red hair. Mrs. Weasley smiled back kindly. "This is George," his face twisted up into what was supposed to be a smile. "And this is Ginny and Harry."

A redheaded girl politely nodded then went back to glaring at Bella, who seemed to be all over her boyfriend, the boy named Harry.

"Okay, that's all I wanted to do," Hermione said. "You can go back to being loud now."

"Bossy as ever," Harry grinned. Bella laughed obnoxiously at his joke.

"Hermione?" Bella called. Hermione made her way over to where she was standing with Harry and Ginny. Cleo cautiously followed her.

"Yes?"

"Do you think you could a picture of me with Harry Potter?" Cleo was confused as to why she used Harry's last name and why she was all over Harry as if he were a rockstar, but Hermione just rolled her eyes and agreed.

"Which camera the normal one, or..." she trailed off.

"Both! I never want to forget this!" Bella squealed.

Harry laughed good-naturedly. Hermione snapped a couple of photos then put the cameras down on a table. She ran over to Harry and practically tackled him.

"I missed you so much!"

"I missed you, too," Harry laughed back.

"I still worry about you, you know? Even though it's all over, I can't stop myself from wondering if you're okay." Cleo was curious if perhaps they had once been a couple. It sure sounded like it when Hermione mentioned it being 'all over'. She decided to ask her later.

"You always worry too much."

"I'm sorry," Hermione smiled, still in Harry's arms. "I can't help it."

"It's not a bad thing, you're proof of that. How many times have you saved my life?"

Hermione pulled away. "I stopped keeping track six years ago."

"After the poison?"

"Devils Snare, actually."

"Good," Harry grinned. "You better run off and look for Ron, I think Ginny's getting jealous."

"Am not!" Ginny protested, having heard their conversation.

Hermione laughed. "Alright. It was nice seeing you, Ginny," she said before walking off in search of Ron. Cleo lingered behind to talk to Bella.

She pulled Bella away from Harry and his girlfriend so they could talk.

"Hey!" Bella said, excited. "Isn't my family great?"

"Yeah, they're really nice," Cleo agreed.

"I can't believe I haven't met them before!"

"Wait, you just met them?"

"Yeah, Dad finally just got back in touch with his sister, Mrs. Weasley that is. She's my Aunt Molly."

"That's sweet. So what's up with you and Harry Potter?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well you're all over him, which quite frankly is making his girlfriend angry, and you're acting like he's some sort of celebrity."

"We went to the same school as kids, that's all."

"What school is that?"

"Just some boarding school called Hogwarts. I'm pretty sure everyone here went there."

"But I thought you moved around a lot."

"I still got to go there for two years. It's a really great school."

"Is it for smart kids or something?"

"Sort of," Bella smirked. "It's really exclusive. Either you have the qualities they want, or you don't. No amount of begging can get you in."

"Sounds fancy."

"It's in an old castle, actually."

"Do you think I have the qualities to get in?" Cleo asked, half joking.

"I doubt it-"

"Oh."

"Because you're not eleven," Bella finished. "But I'm sure there would be plenty of room for you in the lake. According to legend, there are mermaids in there."

"Really?" Cleo asked, intrigued. "Could you tell me those legends?"

"Honestly Harry knows them way better than I do. Maybe he'll tell you."

"Should I ask now?"

"You can wait till tonight. Stories are more fun at night, and trust me, my family knows a lot of stories."

"You really seem to like them."

"I just hope they like me too."

Later that day, around 6 o'clock, Bella was helping her aunt finish preparing dinner as everyone else sat around the rather large table waiting to be served.

Mrs. Weasley passed her dish after dish which Bella, in turn, set on the table. Cleo looked on, making sure Bella wasn't handling any liquids. Bella, in Cleo's eyes, was too excited to remember to protect her secret. It was a good thing Cleo was around to keep an

eye on her.

She tuned out Harry and Ginny's conversation about telephones and concentrated primarily on Bella. She didn't want Bella accidentally giving away her secret after nine years of hard work. The Weasley's seemed nice and all but nobody could find out about a whole other magical world and stay calm about it. She watched as Mrs. Weasley handed Bella a pitcher of water. She had a worried look on her face and whispered something in Bella's ear. 'Maybe she's asking for the pitcher back,' Cleo thought. Unfortunately, Bella just smiled, shook her head, and made her way towards the table.

In seemingly slow-motion, Cleo watched as Bella tripped over a rug, spilling the water all over herself. She looked on in horror as Bella made no attempt to get away; she just sat down with her legs pulled up to her chest and started giggling hysterically.

"Are you alright?" Mrs. Weasley offered her a hand, concerned by her outburst.

Bella smiled and refused her hand. "I'll be fine, but I'm probably going to need a towel." Just then, she brought her legs down and a long orange tail unfurled.

"Bella..." Gideon chastised, sighing at his daughter's behavior.

"Check out her tail!" Ron exclaimed, noticing his cousin lying on the floor.

"Ronald, stop it! That's rude!" Mr. Weasley reprimanded. "Feel free to hit him for that, Hermione." Hermione happily obliged.

"Here's your towel, are you sure you're fine?" Mrs. Weasley asked, acting as her mum.

"Really, I'm okay. Thank you," Bella smiled up at her.

"She's no Hogwarts mermaid, is she, Harry?" George joked.

"You know they scare me," Harry playfully shoved him.

"Giant snakes, escaped convicts, no big deal but, ya' know, when it comes to mermaids," George shuddered mockingly.

"Bella's not the scary type so I think I'm good," Harry said.

"Yeah...As long as she doesn't cause you to go deaf while you're sleeping with her awful singing voice."

"Boys, stop it!" Mrs. Weasley cried out, though everyone could tell she was happy George was teasing Harry. Harry and George grinned.

"She totally agrees with me." George nudged Harry with his elbow.

"Actually, I'm pretty good at singing," Bella said.

"Did you hear something?" George laughed. "How's the weather down there, cuz?"

"It's pretty nice, actually. I've got the perspective of a house-elf."

"Funny, Hermione loves elves, too." Ron pointed out. "No wonder you two are friends. You're both weird."

"Why? Because of my tail? I happen to like it."

"No, because you think elves are cool."

Bella used her powers to harden the shallow puddle of water at his feet.

Ron struggled to get his feet loose. "Thank you," he said sarcastically.

"No problem," he heard her call back sweetly.

"You know I'm of legal age now, I thought you might want to know."

"Why on earth would I want to know that?" Bella asked, feigning confusion.

"Because-"

"Ron, watch it," Hermione warned. "She's got you cornered," Cleo heard her whisper in his ear.

Cleo was appalled that nobody seemed to care that there was a mermaid in the middle of the dining room. Everybody was laughing and joking and absolutely no one asked any questions. It was accepted that Bella was a mermaid as soon as they saw her tail and that was that. Why were these people so tolerant? Didn't they have a breaking point? Apparently not. She had even used magic on Ron, but nobody, including him, was concerned.

Bella finally regained her legs and joined everyone else at the dinner table. "Sorry I'm late," she smiled shyly.

The meal progressed normally. Most of the people around Cleo seemed a bit off, however, as if they were holding back. Every time a conversation got interesting, somebody would immediately change the subject. Cleo was still trying to process their reactions in her head.

Bella noticed something was distracting her. "Are you alright, Cleo?"

Cleo shook her head. "I'm fine. But Bella?"

"Yeah?"

"Can we talk later?"

"Of course," Bella smiled at Cleo before going for a second helping of potatoes.

Once the meal was over, Mrs. Weasley all but pushed the girls out the door. She insisted on washing the dishes herself. "Really, I've got it," she said as she closed the back door, leaving them outside their tent.

"Alright, guess it's time to settle in for the night," Hermione smiled. She held the tent flap open to allow Cleo and Bella to step through. Ginny was inside gathering her things.

Hermione had one foot inside when she turned around to notice the other tent lit from within. "Oh the boys are out here already?" Bella and Cleo shrugged in reply. "You guys go ahead and get comfortable, I'm going to see what they're doing."

"Okay," Cleo answered. She settled into a mountain of pillows and waited for Hermione to close the tent before turning to Bella. "So..." she began.

"Yeah?" Bella asked.

"Well, about earlier. Why did you just sit there? You've kept this a secret for so long."

"But never from my family, have I?"

"So you're saying they knew about you?"

She paused. "My aunt and uncle," she said slowly, "Did. As for the rest of them..."

Cleo raised her eyebrows.

"I don't know, I just don't like hiding."

"You couldn't possibly think that they'd take it that well."

"They're my family-"

"That you've only just met," Cleo interjected. "It's crazy how tolerant they are. I don't think they'd bat an eye if you were some sort of evil witch."

Cleo sat there waiting for an answer and got none. She peered up at Bella's face. She looked as if she had seen a ghost. "Bella? I'm sorry, did I say something?"

"No, it's just, my family doesn't put up with 'evil'. It struck a nerve, that's all."

Cleo was about to question Bella's truthfulness, when their conversation was interrupted by Ginny.

"Hey guys," she said smiling as she stepped into the tent toting a load of fluffy pillows.

"Hi," Cleo looked up and grinned back.

Bella mumbled a greeting and picked at her nails.

"What's up with her?" Ginny asked Cleo.

"I said something I shouldn't have. Leave her alone and she'll be fine."

Bella suddenly rose quickly, causing Cleo to jump. "I need to go ask Hermione something," she announced. She then stepped out of the tent and into the night.

"I should probably go with her..." Cleo suggested, not wanting to awkwardly sit in the tent with Ginny.

"No!" Ginny protested. Cleo's eyes widened at her outburst.

"There's not a lot of room in that tent to begin with and besides, the boys don't take too well to having people in there."

"Okay," Cleo said, her head reeling. She wanted to know what was going on in that there. "Would it be alright if I went and got a glass of water?"

"I don't see why not. Come back soon though, I might get lonely."

"Don't worry, I'll only be a minute." She stepped out of the girls' tent, and when the flap closed, crept over to the other tent.

She decided against going inside when she began hearing voices. "Why not?" she heard Hermione ask.

"Cleo's considered a Muggle," Harry answered. "Sorry."

"Look, we all know she's not a Muggle-" Bella said.

"-But she is in the eyes of the Ministry." Ron interrupted. "Remember Harry and the dementors?"

"Yeah, but remember Harry and Aunt Marge? If we're close to the minister we're off the hook." Hermione argued.

"Look, I agree with you but Kingsley's over in Salem at the moment. Meaning we're subject to whatever judge they give us. And, just so you know, my dad says they still haven't weeded out all the Death Eaters. If you two want to go to Azkaban be my guest, but from what I've heard it's not so great," she heard Ron say.

"Do we have any other options?" Bella asked.

"Yes," Ron said. "Did Hermione ever get around to telling you why she went to Australia?"

Bella shook her head. "She was supposed to be telling me tonight, actually. Hermione?"

"I came to find you."

Bella furrowed her eyebrows, confused. "Pardon?"

"I really like working for creature rights, you guys were the

ultimate creature, or being, that is. Eventually I have to take you three to the Ministry so you can be properly recorded." Cleo gasped. Hermione was going to turn them in to the government? After all that time, she was going to betray them? She waited for Bella's answer, expecting her to be outraged.

"Oh, I see," was the reply she got. Why was Bella being so passive? "So our other option would be to turn ourselves in. That way, Rikki and Cleo are no longer Muggles."

"Exactly," Ron said.

"But they'll hate me forever," Hermione moaned. "They would think I betrayed them. Afterwards, they won't even wait to hear my explanation."

"Then it's settled. We'll wait for Kingsley to get back," Bella announced.

Cleo ran back to her tent, horrified. Was she supposed to just act normal while Hermione and Bella planned her demise? No, they were her friends. Even as they talked about turning her into the government, they stood by her, so there had to be more to the story.

"I couldn't find the cups," she told Ginny as she collapsed in the tent.

"Would you like me to get you one?"

"No, I'll be alright."

They sat in silence for a minute. "Ginny?" Cleo asked.

"Hm?"

"Am I a Muggle?"

Ginny laughed nervously. "You'd like me to think so, but I know you're not." Cleo was confused. Was a Muggle a good or bad thing?

"Are you?" she said tentatively.

"No, I'm not," she smiled. "And I'm happy about that. Muggles are boring."

"What are they?"

"Normal people."

"And I'm not normal?"

"I think we both know the answer to that." Was Ginny hinting at her being a mermaid? How could she possibly know?

"So," Cleo began to test her limits. "What are you?"

"Don't ask questions you don't want to know the answer to," Ginny answered, effectively shutting her up. "Didn't you want Harry to tell you a story or something?"

"Oh yeah. Should I go get him?"

"Alright, but just call for him, don't go in." Cleo nodded and left.

She stepped up to the tent only to hear a conversation about someone named 'Buckbeak'. Feeling as if she had eavesdropped enough for the night, she attempted to knock on the front of the tent.

Hermione shushed everyone. "Ron, George, you've got company."

"So?" Ron asked.

"Get your feet off the table."

"Fine," they huffed. Table? Where could a table possibly fit?

"Who is it?" Harry called.

"It's Cleo," she answered not sure what to say. "Are you guys coming back anytime soon?"

"Uh, yeah, give us a moment," Hermione answered.

"Oh, and you promised me a story from Harry, remember?" Cleo reminded them.

"Guess I'm going too, boys," she heard Harry say.

"Head back to the tent," Bella called out. "We're coming."

Cleo went back to sit with Ginny. Hermione, Bella, and Harry came in a minute later. Harry hit his head on the way in.

"Goodness, Hermione. You're tent's tiny," he complained.

"I think you'll fit, cupboard-boy," she retorted.

"That was low," he said.

"You hurt the tent's feelings. So what story were you planning on telling?"

"What do you suggest?"

"How 'bout the story of The Boy Who Lived?"

Harry sighed. "I bet The Boy himself even hates that story." Cleo noticed Ginny stifling a giggle. "What? You know he doesn't like it."

Hermione leaned over onto his shoulder. "That's because he's modest. It's a great story."

"I'm not telling it. The Boy wouldn't approve." Hermione and Bella smiled. "I heard you wanted to hear more about the mermaids, Cleo?" Cleo nodded.

"Alright. So, rumor has it, there are mermaids living in the Hogwarts

lake. They're nothing like Bella over here though, wouldn't you agree, Bella?"

"I would hope not," she answered.

"The legend says they're blue and terrifying. They are primitive creatures with a whole kingdom beneath the surface of the lake. They fight like warriors, these merpeople, with war cries and spears. And they have these horrible teeth, each filed to a point," he shuddered. "Sometimes, they kidnap Hogwarts students and hold them hostage. But of course none of this is true, mermaids aren't..." he stopped talking when he looked at Bella. "Well I guess they are," he laughed.

"How do you know so much about them?" Cleo asked.

"Other students. Hogwarts has loads of legends like that."

"Like what?"

"I dunno, ghosts, secret passageways, and monsters."

"Sounds scary," Cleo remarked.

Harry shrugged. "There are scarier things out there. Besides, the ghosts are actually pretty nice."

"You know them?" Cleo said skeptically.

"I'm know Nearly Headless Nick pretty well."

"Nearly headless. How can you be nearly headless?" Cleo asked. With that Harry and Hermione burst into laughter. Cleo scrunched up her face. "What?" she asked.

"It's just that," Hermione gasped for air, "I," she had another fit of laughter. "Never mind," she said while laughing.

Just then, Hermione got a phone call. "Hello," she said composing herself. She nodded and said "okay" when needed.

"It's Rikki," she announced when she hung up. "It's a full moon out there," she nodded her head towards the tent door.

"What?" Ginny asked. "You never said anything about werewolves..." She glanced at Hermione.

Hermione shrugged. "Mermaid thing, I guess. I don't really know anything about it."

"Don't feel bad, neither do I," Bella laughed. "Basically, we can't look at the moon."

"We?" Cleo asked.

"Oh just give up, Cleo," Bella laughed. "You can trust everyone here."

"Yeah, right up until they hand me over to the government," Cleo said bitterly.

"She heard us talking," Harry said softly to Hermione.

"Listen, it's not like that," Hermione leaned over and put her hand on Cleo's shoulder.

"Then help me to understand." She pushed Hermione's hand off. "Who are you anyways? Are we even friends?"

"Of course we're friends," Hermione answered.

"I should probably go..." Harry said awkwardly. "I mean it's nice you have girl friends now, but I don't understand this stuff. I'm better off hanging out with Ron and George."

"Wait!" Bella shouted.

"What?" Harry asked, alarmed.

"Let us close our eyes before you open the door...or better yet, tell us a story so we fall asleep."

"Oh please Harry," Ginny asked.

"Which story?"

"The one about the Boy Who Lived saving a damsel in distress from a big, ugly basilisk," Ginny suggested in what seemed to Cleo a flirtatious voice.

"Okay," he began. "Once upon a time there was a boy who could talk to snakes, 'cause you know, he's the wonderful Boy Who Lived and can do everything."

"Harry, make it more interesting. Tell it the way Rita Skeeter would," Hermione said.

"Erm, no thanks. So one day, while sitting in detention, this boy heard some whispering. He was confused, but pushed it to the back of his mind until he could tell his two best friends about it. When he got around to telling them however, they had no idea what he was talking about. It seemed only he could hear the whispering. Look, this is boring. Can I stop?"

"Just, skip to the good stuff," Ginny said.

"Alright, so in the end, the boy went into the girls' bathroom with one of his best friends. His other was in the hospital because the basilisk nearly killed her. The ghost in the bathroom said if they died, they could share her toilet or something, then they jumped down some big tube into the pipes. Down there some rocks inconveniently fell, leaving the boy on one side and his friend on the other. Uh, the boy kept going, killed the basilisk, destroyed a Horcrux, and saved a girl's life."

"Not just any girl," Ginny prompted.

"You're right. He saved the girl who he would grow up to fall in love with and live happily ever after's life."

"No offense, but that was awful," Hermione said.

"Are those seriously the fairy tales around here?" Cleo asked.

"Uh, yeah," Harry answered. "When you read between the lines."

"Alright I guess you're hopeless," Bella laughed. "We'll close our eyes so you can leave."

"Okay. They closed?"

"Yep!"

"Good." He said. Cleo heard him kiss Ginny and step out of the tent. "'Night girls," he said.

He got a chorus of "goodnight's" in return.

16. Chapter 16

****Hey readers :) Sorry (as usual) that this took so long. Its just that schools started and I've got some pretty hard classes with a lot of homework. Thank you guys so much for the reviews. 60?! That's so awesome, please keep it up! Heeeere's the next chapter.****

Cleo awoke extremely early the next morning to a very frantic Lewis on the phone. An obnoxious ringtone that sounded like a fire alarm was going off.

"Hello?" she shouted, effectively waking everyone else.

"Hey, it's Lewis," said the voice on the phone, sounding tense.

"Oh, hi. Look, Lewis I know you're smart and all but there's this thing called a time difference and-"

"Shut up!" Bella yelled, her voice muffled by pillows.

"Cleo, I know there's a time difference. It's just, well, there's a problem."

Hermione, hearing Lewis's voice on the phone mentioning problems, sat up. "What's going on," she mouthed to Cleo. Cleo shrugged.

"A problem?" Cleo asked, her voice raising an octave.

"Yes. A big one." He sighed. "It's Rikki, she's a mermaid."

"Lewis, if that's what you called to tell me at 5 o'clock in the morning, you're dead," she said tiredly, running her fingers through her hair.

"What I meant was, she's a mermaid and people know it."

"Define 'people'," Cleo said suspiciously.

"Everyone at the marine park today around noon," Lewis took a deep breath. "I just don't know what to do."

"Is she on the news or anything?!" Cleo asked, freaking out.

"No, right now the marine park is trying to cover it all up. I don't know what they plan on doing with her. I really need your help, Cleo."

"I understand and I really want to help Rikki but your going to have to make due for a day or two before we can get there because-"

Hermione, having listened to the conversation, snatched the phone out of Cleo's hand. "When do you want us there?" She asked, all business.

"Hermione-" Cleo protested.

Hermione clapped her hand over the phone. "I've got this," she mouthed. She held the phone back to her ear. "Lewis?"

"Eh, as soon as possible really. So I guess I'll see you three in two da-"

Hermione cut him off. "How does an hour sound?"

"Excuse me?" He asked, not sure he was hearing correctly.

"How does it sound?"

"Well, it sounds utterly impossible, that's how it sounds."

Hermione sighed impatiently. "Look, do you want us then or not? 'Cause we can come in two days if that's what you'd rather, but I think the sooner we're there, the higher chance we have of saving Rikki."

"If you think you can make it here in an hour, than an hour it is," Lewis said, trying to appease Hermione.

"Great," Hermione smiled. "Meet you at Rikki's in an hour. You won't be late, will you?"

"I think you should be a bit more worried than I should."

Hermione just laughed. "We'll see. Bye, Lewis."

"Bye, Hermione."

Hermione ended the call. "Alright, everybody up," she said, nudging Bella with her foot.

"Whaa?" Bella mumbled.

"We've got a problem. A huge problem. Rikki's been exposed."

Bella sat up immediately. "Exposed?!"

"This is the end of our lives," Cleo said miserably.

"It's going to be alright, Cleo," Hermione comforted, placing her

hand on Cleo's back. "Okay, so here's the plan. We meet Lewis at Rikki's in an hour and come up with a plan of attack. Then we head over to the marine park and scare the workers into 'forgetting' the mermaid." Cleo could've sworn she had seen Hermione wink at Bella. "And...that's all we've got. Feel free to add."

"Did you say an hour?" Cleo asked.

"Yes, so go pack anything you may need to break into Seaworld and we'll meet in the living room in ten minutes. Sound good?"

"Yeah, but-"

"Cleo, we can save the explanations for after we save the mermaid. We both have more important things on our minds right now. Go pack please."

Cleo sighed in defeat. "This better be a good explanation." She stood and exited the tent, wanting a drink of water. The awful news had made her terribly thirsty.

As she stepped through the back door, she immediately felt that something was different in the house. It seemed more homey and relaxed.

She wandered the kitchen, searching for a glass, when she came across a couple of photographs. She ran her finger along the edge of the cool frame as she took a closer look. Cleo immediately jumped backwards as she realized the people were moving. Moving! She shook her head, the sooner they rescued Rikki the better. All the weirdness was starting to get to her.

Deciding she was no longer thirsty, she walked back outside to grab her backpack. She noticed Hermione was no longer out there, and Bella and Ginny were sitting cross-cross on the floor.

"I wish I lived here," Bella sighed. "I'm going to miss you."

"Maybe...maybe you could meet me in Hogmeade some time. We could get a Butterbeer?" Ginny proposed.

"Oh, could we? I've never been," Bella asked, excited.

"Sure, just the two of us," Ginny smiled. "Oh, hi Cleo," she said, noticing her standing in the opening of the tent.

"Uh, hey," Cleo answered, giving an awkward wave. "Sorry, am I interrupting? I just came to grab my backpack."

"No, no. You're fine," Bella smiled.

"Where'd Hermione go?"

"She went to go ask Aunt Molly for something. She's going to come get us in a minute, then we'll leave."

"Oh, alright. Are you coming too, Ginny?" Cleo said, feeling bad about leaving her.

Ginny laughed. "No, but feel free to call me for back-up. I'm not as good at break-ins as Hermione, but I can still hold my own."

"You're not joking, are you?" Cleo asked warily.

"Don't underestimate Hermione. She may no longer have a price tag on her forehead, but that doesn't mean she's not capable." Ginny wagged her eyebrows ominously. Upon seeing Cleo's face, she burst into laughter.

"I'm sorry, I was only having fun," she giggled. "Quick, pack your bag. I hear someone coming."

Cleo fumbled for her things and Bella slung her bag over her shoulder.

Just then, Hermione burst in with a grin on her face. "Look what I found," she brandishing a flowerpot full of powder.

"What's that?" Cleo asked, confused.

"It's our ticket home," Bella informed her. She lept to her feet. "Shall we go then?"

"Of course, Lewis is waiting," Hermione laughed. "C'mon," she waved them out of the tent with her hand. The girls said a quick goodbye to Ginny as they exited.

Cleo was completely baffled as she followed Hermione and Bella into the living room. There was a roaring fire in the fireplace that wasn't there five minutes ago. "Don't we need to drive to the airport or something?" she asked, trying to bring some sense into what was going on.

"Do you honestly think a car is going to get us to Australia in less than an hour?" Hermione scoffed. "No, we'll be using the Floo Network."

The three of them stood facing the fireplace. "You want me to show you what to do?" Bella asked kindly.

"Yes, please," Cleo muttered.

"Alright, so what you do is grab a handful of powder," she scooped some up from the flowerpot Hermione was holding. "Throw it in the flames," she threw the powder in, causing the fire to turn green. "Then you step in and say very clearly where you want to go. Now, you can't mess this up."

"You're going to burn yourself!" Cleo shouted, grabbing Bella's wrist. Bella was absurd. No matter what color it was, fire was fire and Cleo didn't trust it.

"Relax, Cleo," Hermione said, pulling her hand back. "Just watch."

Bella stepped into the fireplace and said, loudly and clearly, "Prewitt household." Out of nowhere, she disappeared.

"Woah," Cleo breathed.

"See?" Hermione said. "Easy."

Cleo nodded, too shocked to speak.

"Okay, your turn."

"I-I can't," Cleo stuttered. "This is just too much. Sorry, I can't do it."

"I know it's crazy, but you have to do it," Hermione said gently. "Think of Rikki, she needs you right now. You can't let her down."

"I didn't choose this, Hermione. I chose to go on holiday, that's it. I didn't expect I'd have to walk through fire to get home, or," she paused. "Or any of the other strange things happening around here." She pointed to a photograph on that mantle. "You see this picture? It just moved. Moved. I can't do this."

"I think you knew exactly what you were getting in for. You wanted an adventure or else you wouldn't have come. I know you're brave enough to do this, Cleo. C'mon, take a handful."

Cleo sighed and took some Floo powder. "Now what?"

"You throw it in and step into the flames. Then say loudly and very, very clearly 'Prewitt household'. Got it?"

"Think so." She tossed the powder in and walked into the green fire. "Prewitt household," she said.

In a matter of seconds, Cleo found herself in Bella's living room. Bella rose from the couch and helped her up. "Took you long enough," she smiled.

A moment later Hermione appeared. She jumped up and brushed herself off. "Now was that so bad?" she teased Cleo.

Cleo rolled her eyes. "I'm sorry I wasn't born into this like the rest of you."

"The rest of you?" Hermione laughed. "Hate to break it to you, but neither was I. You get used to it," she smiled. "C'mon, now. We hafta go prove Lewis wrong."

"That sounds fun," Bella laughed.

"And we have to rescue Rikki before we're revealed to the universe," Cleo reminded them, instantly killing the fun.

"Alright then, we've best be going. Lead the way, Bella." Bella marched out the front door followed by the two girls.

It took them thirty minutes to walk to Rikki's Cafe, giving them twenty minutes to wait for Lewis. They had each ordered juices and were anxiously waiting for him to arrive. After five minutes of tense silence besides Cleo's incessant finger-tapping which was earning her glares from the other girls, Cleo decided to call him.

"I can't do this," she said. "If I have to wait another five minutes, I'm going to head over to the marine park and break her out myself. I'm calling." She pulled out her phone and selected Lewis's name from her list of favorite contacts. Anxiously she waited for him to pick up.

"Hello?" he answered.

"Hey, Lewis. Are you on your way? 'Cause we're here and to be honest, waiting is causing me to freak out."

"Yeah, I'm right outside. I was heading over early to set up some things, but I guess you beat me to it."

"Oh good," she sighed in relief when she saw him walk through the beaded curtain and immediately ended the call. She stood up as he made it over to their table and kissed him hello.

"I see you managed to make it," Lewis said as he took a seat. Hermione nodded back. "How?" He raised his eyebrows.

"There's no point in telling you, Lewis," Hermione retorted. "You're just going to dissect our answer and try to understand it scientifically. Thing is, there is no scientific aspect to it whatsoever, so you're better off not knowing. What counts is we're here now and ready to rescue Rikki."

Bella and Cleo hid smiles. Lewis had been put in his place and he knew it. "Well, em, okay," he said, a bit shaken.

He pulled a map out of his bag and unfurled it on the table. He marked a big blue 'x' on the paper and pointed to it. "This," he said, "Is where they're keeping her. It's a rather large tank, like the one that they keep Ronnie in, in the sense that it opens into the ocean. However, the sides are raised up much farther so she cannot get out. Bella and Cleo, you two can try to get in there, but if you have something better be my guest. There's tons of security and I'm sure they would be very happy to have three mermaids instead of one."

"What will you be doing?" Cleo asked.

"I'll be hacking into the security system and shutting off the cameras. That way, you're free to do whatever you like to get her out." He lowered his voice to a whisper, "Like magic."

"What do I do?" Hermione asked.

"Just, keep watch or something."

"That's it? 'Keep watch'?" Hermione asked angrily.

"What do you suggest then?" Lewis challenged. "You're not a mermaid or some tech genius. You've never even had to rescue a mermaid before, Hermione. You don't know what's going on, please just lay low and do as I say."

Hermione shook her head. "How disappointing, Lewis," she said. "You don't seem to understand how lucky you are to have me on the rescue team." She laughed. "If only you could see my resume."

"She's a wanted criminal, Lewis," Cleo interrupted. "I think she can handle breaking and entering."

"Who told you that?!" Hermione said, shocked. "Don't worry," she told them. "I'm not wanted anymore." Noticing Lewis's worried look she added, "Or a criminal." She smirked. "And, let's just say in theory, if I was a criminal, they never caught me," she smiled suggestively.

Lewis just shook his head, confused.

"So what do you need me to do then? I'm pretty much able to do whatever you want."

Lewis sighed. "Unless there's a way for you to transform into the person in charge and order her released, there's no amount of illegal credentials that could help."

"Oh, too bad that's not possible," Hermione said in a monotone voice, her eyes staring deep into Bella's. "I guess I'll just keep watch."

"Okay thanks, Hermione," Ron said. "You guys ready to go?"

"Actually, I have to use the toilet. Hermione, do you have to go?" Bella said.

"Yeah, I do," she said hastily, clearly playing along.

Cleo grabbed her wrist as she moved away from the table. "Nothing too crazy," she hissed.

Hermione just giggled and slipped out of her grip. She followed Bella to the back of the cafe.

Five minutes later, they bounced back to Lewis and Cleo. "Ready?" Hermione asked her head cocked expectantly.

"Of course, we've been waiting on you two, remember," Lewis answered indignantly. "Alright so Hermione and I will be taking the front entrance. Cleo and Bella, you guys head round back to her tank through the water. Try and find a way in that way first. If that fails, find Hermione and she'll get the message to me. Hermione?"

"Hm?"

"You'll be standing by the log flume."

"If you say so," Hermione groaned.

I know, not my best work, but I've just been stuck here trying to figure out how to transition into the next part and decided to just cut it here and give you what I have so far because you've been patiently waiting. Hopefully, I'll be updating again soon!

****Sorry if this totally sucks but I feel so awful making you guys wait, especially since you've been so patient. Here's another chapter:****

They had all piled into Lewis's car and were on their way to the marine park.

"So what's Zane's part in all of this?" Cleo asked. "Shouldn't he be helping?"

"He was out of town visiting his uncle today. He's on his way over right now and has been designated the get-away driver. As soon as he makes it here, he's going to park outside of Stage C, where the dolphin show is performed. When somebody manages to get Rikki, they should bring her out to his truck. He'll take it from there."

"Can you tell us exactly what happened in the park today?" Hermione spoke up from the backseat.

"According to eyewitnesses on the news, a girl was seen wandering around near the dolphin tanks--"

"Probably looking for Ronnie," Cleo said.

"Yes, thank you Cleo," Lewis said sarcastically. "Anyways, she was sitting down by the water talking to Ronnie, when the cameras picked up on her. Security was dispatched since that is a generally restricted section. While the men were leading her away, however, Ronnie splashed her. And I'm sure you know what happened from there..."

"They thought she was trying to run..." Cleo spoke softly.

"And they restrained her," Lewis finished.

"This is awful," Bella moaned.

"It's all under control," Hermione said, comforting her. "Really, don't worry, we can do this."

"You're right," Bella sighed. "I'm worrying too much."

"Don't beat yourself up about it," Cleo laughed sadly from the passenger seat. "So am I."

"Again, that's all just eyewitness testimony," Lewis said. "The marine park is holding a press conference at five this afternoon."

"But that only gives us two hours!" Cleo exclaimed. Her eyes practically bugged out of her head.

Lewis reached for her hand. "We'll take care of it," he told her, giving her hand a gentle squeeze.

Cleo was breathing quickly and her face pinked. "Why must this be so difficult?"

"Who ever said rescuing a mermaid would be easy? C'mon we're here,"

Hermione said as Lewis swung the car into a parking space.

After briskly walking through the parking lot, the group arrived at the front gate.

"This is where we leave?" Cleo asked.

"Yeah," Lewis confirmed. "You and Bella need to find a way into the water outside of Rikki's tank."

"Aye, aye, captain," Bella saluted him before walking away with Cleo.

"So that leaves us..." Hermione said, rocking back on her heels.

Lewis pursed his lips and nodded. "Any idea how to get this through security?" he said gesturing to his big, brown leather briefcase full of computer-hacking supplies.

Hermione rolled her eyes. "You don't have a plan to get that through the baggage check?"

Lewis shook his head sheepishly. "In my defense, I only had two hours to come up with a plan."

Hermione sighed and held out her hand. "Alright, give it to me."

He passed it off. "What are you going to do?"

"Meet you inside with the briefcase," she quipped.

"Wha-?"

"C'mon then, go through the gates. I'll take it from here."

"Okay..." he said suspiciously as he turned to walk through.

Once Hermione was sure nobody was looking, she set down the briefcase and began rummaging through her bag. It looked small, but in reality she had anything she could possibly use to save Rikki comfortably stuffed inside. Her mouth turned up into a slight smile when she found what she was looking for. Her favorite Hallow: Harry's Invisibility Cloak. She glanced around again to double-check before drawing it out of the bag and wrapping it around her and the briefcase. Free admission, she thought, openly grinning under the privacy of the cloak.

Hermione allowed herself a wide girth around the tourists waiting in line, not wanted to bump anything. She came up to the wheelchair entrance and slowly pulled the gate open, then closed it behind her. Finding solitude behind a thick tree trunk, she took off the cloak, folded it neatly, and placed it pack in her purse.

Looking up, she found Lewis standing in the middle of a sea of people wearing a confused expression. She shook her head. Must he be so clueless? She shoved her way through the masses over to him, took hold of his hand, and yanked him out of the crowd.

"You did it?" His voice was high, his eyebrows raised.

"You needn't sound so surprised," Hermione said. "Here," she shoved the briefcase into his arms.

He stumbled backwards. "How'd you do that?"

"It was easy," she smirked. "Guess I'll be over by the log flume then," she said sarcastically.

Lewis sighed. "Look, if you know of something you can do that would be more...productive, by all means, do it."

"You mean it?" she smiled.

"Yeah," he said, defeated.

"Great, I know just the thing," she told him, fingering the bottle of Polyjuice Potion in her bag. "I guess I should be off then?"

"Mmm hmm. I should be going too. Good luck, Hermione. Try not to end up on a wanted poster."

"Very funny," she frowned. "Good luck to you, too." She turned to walk away.

"Wait, Hermione," he grabbed her arm.

"Yes?"

He looked at his feet, and kicking at the ground he asked "If I need like backup, or something, I can call you right?"

"You have my number," she told him, then spun on her heel and began making her way to the dolphin tank, determined to find out who was in charge of Operation Mermaid.

Once she had crossed the bridge over the pelican pond and strode past the log flume, her original post, Hermione watched a cute blonde woman barking orders at burly men in security uniforms and scrawny scientists in lab coats. She herself was wearing khakis and a white polo shirt. Her hands were on her hips as she stood still, but her arms crossed when she began pacing.

Hermione pulled out the cloak again and threw it around her shoulders. She needed to make it to the blonde. There was a certain air about her- Hermione was almost sure she was important. She could not have weighed more than 55 kilos, but nobody could seem to stand up to her. She clearly held the power around here. Perfect.

Silently Hermione crept up to her from behind. Before the woman could move, she plucked a hair out of her ponytail and jumped backwards.

"Ow!" the woman gasped, surprised. Her hands flew to her golden ponytail. She looked left and right, shook her head, confused, then walked off to find someone else to yell at. Hermione stopped her before she could get anywhere though.

"Stupefy," she whispered, her wand drawn. She caught the woman in her

arms, wrapping the Invisibility Cloak around the both of them and slowly dragged her off to the toilets which were, conveniently, out of order.

The room was normal as far as public toilets go. The walls were coated in a chipped layer of white paint and the floor was made up of blue and white alternating tiles. As soon as she dropped the woman to the ground, she took off the cloak and locked the door.

She took out a bottle of Polyjuice Potion and dropped in a blonde hair. Yum. She grimaced and cautiously took a sip. It had a sweet flavor but an awful aftertaste. Knowing she wouldn't be able to finish it otherwise, she gulped down the rest.

She strode over to the mirrors to watch the transformation take place, flinching as she saw her face change shape and smiling at the silky blonde hair that replaced her brown locks. Once she had become a perfect clone, she knelt down by the woman and carefully stripped off her polo and khakis and placed them on the counter. She then removed her own sundress, picked out for the reason that it could easily be taken off, yanked the shirt over her head, and stepped into the pants. Her hands slowly brought her hair back into a ponytail, savoring the soft, easily tamed strands.

She halfheartedly dressed the blonde in her sundress, feeling bad about leaving her exposed. The woman believed what she was doing was right and Hermione understood that. She tied up the woman and placed her in a supply closet, removing her shoes when doing so.

Hermione then closed the door, startling herself with the large bang that accompanied it. She pulled on the pair of trainers, now the perfect shoe size, and stood up, walking back and forth to try them out. She made checked that she had her purse in her hand and wand in her pocket, before twisting the lock and stepping out into the light.

Her plan was simple, order the big men to move Rikki into the truck parked next to Stage C. She would say they were transporting her to get dressed before the press release, or something like that. It was hardly a foolproof plan but had a much higher chance of success than the one devised by Team Mermaid.

Unfortunately for Hermione, however, Cleo had decided to kidnap the woman as well. Cleo watched, flanked by Bella and Lewis as a blonde lady stepped cautiously out of a door plastered in an Out-of-Order sign. She hesitantly looked back and forth between moving into view. Cleo fought back a cry. "Denman," she whispered frantically to Lewis. Her eyes were wide with the desire to hurt her. She had called him for backup when Bella and herself had failed to find a way into Rikki's tank and had decided to just attack instead.

"Alright, Cleo," Lewis said soothingly. "Let's think calmly and rationally before-"

He watched as Cleo ran forward, brought back her right hand balled up into a fist, and punched Denman in the face, effectively knocking her backwards. Denman's eyes were wide with horror and confusion as she lied on the pavement.

"Cleo," Lewis groaned. He stood up from his crouch and beckoned Bella

to follow with two of his fingers. Together they raced over to Cleo's side, who was currently clenching and unclenching her hand, in awe of what she had done.

"Don't just stand there," Bella reprimanded, "Someone will see. Grab her hands. Lewis," she turned to face him, "Hold her feet. I'll keep watch right here. I don't think there will be a problem seeing as we're five steps away from the door." She rolled her eyes.

"Wha-" Lewis said.

"Look, just drag her inside."

Lewis and Cleo complied, half-carrying, half-pulling the blonde through the open door. Denman thrashed back and forth in protest.

"Lemme go!" she exclaimed.

"Why on earth would we do that?" Cleo asked, letting go of her hands. Her head dropped onto the hard tile with a loud thud.

She opened her mouth to respond, only to be interrupted by Bella tying her to the foot of a stall divider with a hose that she had found coiled outside. The green hose looped around her waist and was knotted on the inside of the stall, leaving her hands free.

"You have the wrong person," she huffed indignantly.

"We haven't accused you of anything," Cleo crossed her arms and cocked her head. "Clearly you feel guilty about something. Perhaps for, I don't know, taking away our powers?" She kicked the metal rubbish bin angrily, causing Denman to jump. Cleo waited for a response, but only got a look of utter confusion.

"You don't remember?" she asked sarcastically. "Lewis, could you fill in Linda here about what she did a few years back?" she said eying the woman the entire time.

"Look, I have no idea what you're talking about. You have to let me go or Rikki'll be revealed!" she exclaimed, panic evident in her voice.

"Making threats, are we?" Bella asked. She had no history with the woman but already felt hatred towards her for holding Rikki captive.

The blonde sighed, and continued patiently. "I'm not threatening, merely stating a fact. I am not the person you need to worry about-"

"Oh but I think you are," Cleo interjected.

Hermione sighed silently as she thought up a distraction. She couldn't let the Polyjuice Potion wear off, or she'd have no way of ordering the workers around. "Accio clipboard," she muttered under her breath. Denman had dropped one when Hermione had Stupefied her.

Suddenly there was a loud banging on the door. The clipboard, trying

to get in.

"Oh no," Cleo exclaimed. "We'll get arrested for kidnapping if someone finds us in here." She wrung her hands nervously.

"Well, what do we do?" asked Lewis.

"You stay here," Bella said. "Make sure she doesn't move. Cleo and I will check on that." She grabbed Cleo's hand and they both tiptoed to the heavy metal door.

Once they were a few steps away, Hermione murmured something and the ruckus came to an abrupt halt.

"What--"

"Shh," Bella shushed Cleo. She slowly reached for the doorknob as Cleo shaped her hand, ready to use mermaid magic on the intruder. Bella threw the door open but was faced with nothing.

"Look," Cleo pointed to the ground. "Whoever it was, they dropped their clipboard."

Bella bent down and picked it up. There was no name on it, but it most definitely belonged to the door-knocker. "C'mon, before they get too far." She beckoned to Cleo and they tore off.

"What am I, chopped liver?" Lewis yelled after sarcastically. The door closed with a clang. "Alright, guess I get to have a chat with you."

Hermione rolled her eyes. "I don't even know what you're trying to accuse me of. The girls have powers, clearly I didn't 'take them away' or whatever."

"Exactly what powers are you talking about?"

"They're mermaid ones obviously. Why, do they have others?" she shrugged her shoulders sarcastically.

"And you know this because you captured Rikki?"

"I know that all three of them are mermaids; Rikki, Cleo, and Bella."

"Not four?"

"There's another one?"

"Forget it," Lewis said nervously.

"Look, Lewis, I'm done. I don't have time for these games," she took out her wand from her back pocket.

"What's--"

"I'm not 'Linda' or whoever," she muttered something under her breath and the hose unwrapped itself, wriggling like a snake. Lewis moved backwards, confused and scared.

She stood, put her left hand on her hip, and clasped her wand in her right. "There's no need to freak out, Lewis. I'm Hermione. And I need to go."

"Her-Hermione?" he stuttered.

"Yeah, and right about now I have exactly," she looked down at her wrist, "Ehh an hour before the ministry sends me an owl for performing magic in front of a Muggle and about, I don't know, fifteen minutes before my Polyjuice Potion wears off. Leaving me pretty much no time to talk to you. Bye, Lewis."

She would have ended up getting revealed either way. If the Polyjuice Potion wore off she'd end up transforming back to her normal self, so she decided to reveal herself on her terms, and while she still had the advantage of looking like the blonde drill sergeant.

"But you don't even have a watch on," he said quietly.

"It's called sarcasm. If you see Bella, tell her it was me you guys were questioning, please. Let her know that my Polyjuice Potion is losing its effect so let me be. Oh and have her check that supply closet," she nodded her head towards the door on the wall.

"Could you please tell me what's going on?" He asked.

"Well the Ministry will come for me soon for pulling that stunt with the Floo powder, and I guess that Accio charm wasn't a good idea either..." She mused.

Lewis raised his eyebrows.

"Eh, what the hell. I'm a witch, Lewis." She grinned. "You should try being bad every now and again. It's exhilarating."

Lewis stared blankly back at her.

"Close your mouth, it's unbecoming." And with that, she walked out the door.

18. Chapter 18

****Here's a new chapter- really short but still better than nothing I guess. Thank you for sticking with me even though I'm so slow! Love you guys!****

While Hermione sprinted off to God knows where, Lewis sunk down to the floor trying to comprehend what he had just heard.

A witch? That would explain why it only took the girls an hour to travel halfway across the globe. Hermione never seemed too strange though, other than the fact that she participated in their weird mermaid activities as if they weren't strange at all.

She had seemed so normal, in fact, that Lewis had admired her. She was like him, a sort of kindred spirit as cheesy as that sounded. He had a fondness for her, not at all like what he had with Cleo, but an understanding of each other. Both Hermione and himself appreciated a good book and recognized the beauty in schoolwork. Did witches have

the same schoolwork as normal people? He supposed not. Lewis smiled as he imagined a school full of witches marching through the halls wearing pointed hats.

He found himself thinking about Hermione and university. He should talk to her about it, let her know her possibilities. She was a very bright girl and could do something amazing with her life if she could concentrate on something other than magic. He wondered if witches had specific jobs. What if it was a whole secret society? He couldn't wait to ask her about it after they rescued Rikki.

Right, Rikki. What was he supposed to be doing to help? He had completely lost his train of thought thinking about the impossible. Hadn't Denman- no, Hermione- said something about the supply cabinet? Lewis decided to check that out.

What was in there? Cleo had mentioned Hermione being a sort of criminal but she wasn't the type to murder, was she? He couldn't be sure of anything anymore.

He took slow, cautious steps over to the closet, scared of what was inside, but needing to know. He stretched out his hand towards the knob when suddenly, out of nowhere, came a thunderous cracking noise from behind him. He snapped his hand back immediately, cursing.

Lewis whipped his head around, practically breaking his neck in the process. He saw Hermione standing there in Denman's clothing, holding Cleo's cell phone.

"Didn't work," she gasped, taking deep breathes. "They have...them all." She held out the phone. "Cleo threw this at me. Told me to warn Emma. Who's that?" She asked, regaining her breath.

"Old friend," Lewis tried to say nonchalantly, while freaking out on the inside because Cleo had been caught, along with trying to figure out how Hermione could defy the laws of physics.

Hermione held the phone up to her ear after selecting Emma from Cleo's contact list.

The phone didn't even ring once before a girl had picked up the other line. "Cleo, thank God! What's going on down there?! I thought we were goners! They won't come for me will they? I mean obviously it's a hoax if you're safe." As the girl paused to take a breath, Hermione jumped in, knowing she wouldn't be able to get a word in otherwise.

"Emma, I presume?"

"Wh-who is this?" Emma stuttered nervously.

"Hermione. Give me a minute, I'll explain-"

"You have ten seconds before I hang up."

"I'm a friend of Cleo's. It's no hoax. I'm sure you know the girls are mermaids, correct?"

"Yes," she said softly. "But how do you?"

"Long story. Anyways-"

"Tell me or I'm not talking," she said, having found her confidence.

"Fine. I live with Cleo, there was a full moon, I'm sure you can figure out the rest. Anyways, as I was saying, Cleo wanted me to warn you."

"Thanks-"

"But I'm not Cleo."

"What are you getting at?"

"I need your help, Emma. Any information, secrets, tips, anything would help."

"I don't know you. How am I supposed to trust you? You could just be another scientist."

"I know your secret," Hermione said. By the tone in Emma's voice, it sounded as if she not only knew the secret, but shared it. Hermione used her hunch to get the girl to talk.

Hermione heard a sigh on the other end. "You wouldn't..."

"You're right, I probably wouldn't. But there's still a chance that I could."

"Please," Emma said nervously.

"Yes?"

"We can talk, just don't..."

"Good. Omigod I'm a genius!" She beckoned Lewis over. "Hold on a moment, Emma."

She turned to him and cupped the receiver with her hand. "I've got a plan, Lewis. You in?"

He gulped and nodded, intrigued and terrified at the same time.

"Lewis is there?! Please let me speak to him," Emma said, confused and hanging on to Lewis as her way out.

"You can talk to him when we meet you, we're running out of time."

"Meet me?"

"Yes, meet. Could you please tell me your exact location?"

"I'm in a hotel in London," she said hesitantly.

"Do you think you could meet me at Kings Cross Station in a few minutes? I'll explain when I get there."

"Are you positive this will help Cleo and Rikki?"

"Definitely. Oh, and you forgot to mention Bella. It'll help her too, you know," Hermione joked.

"Bella?"

"Never mind. Meet me at Kings Cross."

"That's pretty broad. Do you have a certain area in mind?"

"Ah, between Platforms 9 and 10," Hermione answered without hesitation. "Look, I'm sorry we got off to a rough start. You seem very nice and I'm not going to do anything to harm you. Any friend of the mermaids is a friend of mine."

"It's fine. I understand you needed to get me to comply- even if I don't agree with your method. How do you plan on getting there?"

"Magic," Hermione smiled.

"Excuse me?"

"Don't worry, we'll be there. I'll see you in a moment."

"Nice talking to you," Emma said awkwardly before hanging up.

"Okay, you ready, Lewis?" Hermione asked, extending her palm to him.

"Ready to do...what, exactly?" He asked, his voice shaking.

"We have to go meet Emma. Weren't you listening?" She cocked her head.

"C'mon, hold my hand."

"Wait-"

"Lewis we've-"

"What's in the closet, Hermione?" Lewis said assertively.

"Oh! Thanks for reminding me," she walked over to the door.

"You could just tell me..."

His eyes widened as she took out that strange wand-thingy and whispered "Alohamora." He heard the clicking of the lock and watched Hermione swing the door.

"Ta-da," she smiled as Lewis got a view of what- or in fact who- was inside.

"Denman," he breathed. She was apparently knocked unconscious and wearing the dress he had seen Hermione in earlier.

"Yes, Denman. I need to erase her memory before we leave," she said

hurriedly.

"You can do that?" Lewis said, accidentally speaking his thoughts.

"Yes, I'm very good at it," she replied, seemingly bitter. "Obliviate," she muttered in an angry tone as she held up her wand again. Lewis watched as her memory floated away.

"Sorry, did I say something...?" Lewis asked concerned.

"I just..." she sighed. "My parents don't know me anymore. Let's leave it at that."

"I'm sorry," Lewis mumbled.

"Don't be, it's my fault. They don't need to be in the dark anymore but they're so happy without me that..." She trailed off. "Let's go meet up with Emma," she briskly changed the subject. "Hand?" She held out her palm to Lewis, who cautiously grasped it. "Now this might be a slight bit uncomfortable..."

19. Chapter 19

****Hi to anyone that's still sticking with me! I know I'm a terrible human being for leaving you for months with nothing- not even an explanation and I'm incredibly sorry. A big thanks to gokul234tien for PMing me. That message only consisted of one word, but somehow it had the power to make me keep writing. Also thank you so much everyone that reviewed- I love you guys! This chapter's really short and I'm sorry but I owe you guys something after being MIA. I really appreciate all the feedback and if anyone has ideas feel free to message me!****

Lewis' world was spinning, his stomach churning, and his head pounding. All he knew was that he wasn't in Australia, but instead somewhere in the harsh winter. A disembodied voice that sounded familiar spoke to him. "You might want to sit down for a moment."

He slid down to the icy ground beneath him, only to be reprimanded for getting his clothes wet- what little clothes he had that was. His fishing shirt and Bermuda shorts offered so little warmth that he might as well be naked.

Nevertheless, the chill helped him quickly regain his bearings- and when he did he was not happy.

"What the hell, Hermione?!" He yelled, leaping to his feet. "'A slight bit uncomfortable?' I felt like I was going to die!"

Hermione just stood there in what Lewis had decided was an alleyway, arms crossed, allowing him to finish his rant.

"Not to mention the fact that I'm freezing! Where are we and what did you just do?"

"We're in London and that was called Apparation. It's cold because it's winter here, but I suppose you've figured that out. Would you care for a coat?" she asked politely.

Lewis was taken aback at her calmness. "I-I suppose. Are you gonna use some spell or something?" His anger was giving way to his intrigue with witches.

"Actually I have one right here in my purse," she said, taking it off of her shoulder and opening the metal clasp.

"Your purse?" He asked looking incredulously at the small pouch of fabric.

She laughed. "It's been charmed. I can fit anything I need in here." She stuck her hand in retrieving a black coat for Lewis with a number of suspicious tears and even a burn hole. "Here you are," she said, passing it to him.

"Who's coat is this?" He asked, fingering the hole.

Hermione pulled out a grey coat of her own and put it on before answering. "It's Harry's."

"How did Harry's coat end up in your purse?" Lewis asked as he stuck his arms through the sleeves.

"Long story," Hermione said, quickly dismissing it.

"Well it's a long walk to wherever it is we're going, isn't it?"

"Not necessarily," she quipped.

Lewis stared at her, eyebrows raised until she relented.

"Fine," she sighed. "Follow me and stay close. And please, for Merlin's sake, keep your voice down."

Lewis grinned at both Hermione giving up, and her witchy use of the word 'Merlin'. "Of course."

"We're headed to King's Cross Station- that's about three blocks away. Come on." She grabbed his arm and together they stepped out of the alleyway and into the crowds of people. They began making their way towards the station.

"So Harry's coat.." Lewis reminded her.

"Harry, Ron, and I dropped out of school last year to travel around Great Britain. I was in charge of keeping everyone's things."

"That's not a long story."

"No, I suppose it's not. I had just assumed you would ask questions."

"You assumed correctly," Lewis smiled. "So why is this coat so beat up?"

"We had a few run-ins with the law...and some magical beasts." Hermione admitted reluctantly.

"So when the girls were talking about you being a criminal earlier-"

"They were right. However in my defense, the government was corrupted. It was an awful time," she grimaced remembering the cruelty of the Death Eaters.

"And it's safe for me to assume that Harry and Ron are witches too?" Lewis asked, struggling to see where they fit it.

Hermione began giggling. "Wizards, Lewis. Girls are witches and boys are wizards."

Lewis' face burned. He wasn't usually laughed at for his theories.

"Sorry," he smiled sheepishly. "Maybe that assumption wasn't right, but can I try another?"

"Sure, sure," Hermione said, still trying to reign in her laughter.

"This corrupted government isn't the government of the UK, is it? I mean governments nowadays are corrupted, but not to the point where teenagers need to go into hiding for their own safety- at least not in first-world countries. Do you witches- and wizards- have your own secret society?"

Hermione quit giggling. "I never thought I'd be revealing our world to a Muggle," she whispered. She took a deep breath then continued. "Yes, it's called the Wizarding World- a bit sexist, I know, seeing as half of the Wizarding World are, in fact, witches but I suppose the Witching World doesn't have the same appeal."

Lewis, although amused by her feminist rant, attempted to bring her back to the subject on hand. "How do normal human governments fit into all of it?"

"First of all, although I am a witch I am still a human first. We are not a different species, although many dangerous wizards believe we should be. For this reason, we use the word 'muggle' to refer to non-wizarding folk, okay?" Lewis nodded.

"And as for the muggle governments, I suppose we still abide by their laws. In the UK, there is a ministry- the Ministry of Magic- that governs witches and wizards. It's the only one we are usually concerned with. The prime minister does, however, know about our existence and there have been rumors that the royal family does as well, although that has never been confirmed. I actually work for the ministry of magic."

"But what about school?"

"I actually turned 19 recently so no school for me."

"There aren't any wizarding universities?"

"There are a few trade schools but none other than that. Most of us go straight into the workforce."

Lewis was shocked. This whole 'wizarding world' thing sounded very sophisticated. Wouldn't they have higher education? Then it came to him. If Hermione was 19 and worked for the government, what on earth was she doing posing as an exchange student in Australia.

"Hold on, one last question," he said stopping. Crowds of hurrying people shoved past.

"Go ahead, but keep walking," Hermione yanked him forward.

"Why are you pretending to be an exchange student? Is it some sort of cultural experiment to see what muggles are like or are you on a government mission or what?"

"I already know what muggles are like. I was raised as one."

"You're avoiding the question."

"Fine. Yes, I was sent to Australia by the ministry to collect records on the Gold Coast mermaids."

Upon seeing the judgmental look on his face, she continued. "But that doesn't mean that I don't love you guys! It's not like I'm giving the muggle government their information. The Ministry of Magic wants it so that they can be properly listed as magical beings. Once that happens, the ministry will aid in protecting their secrets."

"Okay, I understand," Lewis said slowly.

"Good," she sighed in relief. "Now we're nearing the station. I'd tell you my plan but then I'd just be repeating myself to Emma in a couple minutes so I'll give you a hint: Emma's a mermaid and the Ministry is located in London."

"I don't think Emma will be enthusiastic about turning herself over to the government," Lewis said after taking a moment to think it over.

"I'm sure she'll do anything if it helps save her friends."

They passed through the entrance to the station and Hermione drew Lewis in close, not wanting to lose him. "So what does she look like?" She asked.

Lewis quickly described her as only a boy could, using phrases like 'yellow-ish hair' and 'sometimes she wears blue'. Hermione rolled her eyes at his attempt and concluded that Lewis would have to be the one that found her.

After making their way to the space between Platforms 9 and 10 and searching for about ten minutes, Lewis spotted Emma.

"Emma!" He shouted, running over to her and awkwardly embracing her.

"Lewis!" She grinned as they pulled apart. She glanced down at his attire. "I always knew you weren't very fashionable, but what is with that awful outfit?"

"I suppose that's my fault," Hermione said, walking over and joining the conversation. "You see, I yanked him out of Australia and brought him to the English winter." She held out her hand. "Hermione," she introduced herself.

The blond took it cautiously. "Emma." She turned to Lewis. "Lewis what's going on? You know I hate going into things blindly."

"Sorry, but Hermione's going to have to explain this one. Just keep an open mind, please."

Hermione began to tell Emma about the Wizarding World and the Ministry of Magic when she was interrupted.

"Excuse me, but I'm supposed to believe that you're a witch?" Emma crossed her arms. "Give me proof."

Hermione looked at Lewis, exasperated, and Lewis shrugged back.

"Fine, come over here to this brick wall and take my hand." Hermione walked over to the entrance to the platform that was home to the Hogwarts Express.

Emma narrowed her eyes skeptically, but did as she was told.

"Lewis, do you want to come?" Hermione asked. "We can continue this conversation somewhere quieter."

"I- sure. Do I just.." He reached for Emma's hand.

"Yes, just like that. Now follow me and try not to look suspicious." She bent her right leg, and leaned back as though leaning against the wall, but then she disappeared going straight through the brick. Emma and Lewis quickly followed suit.

Hermione dropped Emma's hand and gestured around them. "Welcome to Platform 9 3/4!"

**Okay, I know it was mostly dialogue, but Lewis needed to be filled in on everything magic-y. There will be plenty of action in the next chapter. Also, I plan to update again within the next week and a half. If I don't, feel free to call me out and I'll be sure to post with a few hours. I'm making this promise so be sure to hold me accountable :) **

20. Chapter 20

I'm just gonna leave this here...

While the whole mermaid situation was undeniably stressful for Hermione, being on her home turf made her considerably more comfortable. She could almost hear the voices of families sending their children off and smell the steam from the Hogwarts Express. She shook her head to clear her thoughts and turned to Lewis and Emma. "Believe me?"

"Yeah, yeah. I get it now, you're a witch. This is...weird but I can deal. Can you please tell me what's going on with Cleo and Rikki?"

Emma asked, pressing her fingers to her temples.

"Cleo, Rikki, and Bella have all been taken by Denman's little henchmen. Although, I shouldn't call them 'little' since they are, in fact, quite large," she mused. "Anyway, you are the only one that can help them at this point."

"How is that? And can someone please explain to me who this 'Bella' is?!"

"Bella? You aren't friends then? I had assumed with her being a mermaid and all-"

"They replaced me with another mermaid?! Lewis, how could you?!" She whipped around to Lewis with pursed lips and a fire in her eyes.

Lewis, currently tracing the mortar of the solid brick wall they had traveled through turned to face Emma. "Hm?"

"Bella?" She spat at him.

"It-it's not-I mean we're not-I mean-"

"Spit it out, hey?"

"We would never replace you, Emma. That's impossible. We just...happened to meet another mermaid and we became friends. We weren't about to create another Charlotte.."

Emma closed her eyes and took a deep breath. "Alright, if you say so. Look, I'm still not okay with it but I can forget about it for now, I suppose," she turned back to Hermione. "I'm sorry for the interruption. Your plan?"

"Yes, well as I was saying, you are the only one who can help them. Did you catch what I said about the Ministry of Magic?"

"Magical government, yeah I got it," she answered folding her arms across her chest and raising a thin eyebrow. "What's it got to do with me?"

"Okay don't get too upset- Lewis tell her not to freak out," she said, her face pleading.

Lewis sighed. "You're not gonna like this, Em, but it's crazy enough to get us out of this mess."

"Shoot."

"The Ministry will protect the mermaids from Muggles- that is, normal, non-magical people- if there is a recorded existence of mermaids on file. Problem is, we don't have any information on your kind. To solve this, we need to do is take you down to the Ministry, have them look at you, draw up a sketch or two of your tail, and maybe get a scale sample. You can come back some other time for the interview for 'Being' status. Once all of that's over with we can hand over this problem to the Ministry and the whole thing will be fixed in no time. You're a mermaid, which is just what we need. And London is where the government building is located- the Wizarding

World is a little archaic in that England still rules over most of its colonies."

"'Hand over this problem'?! I don't think you realize the complete and utter mess we are in right now!" Emma shrieked, throwing her hands in the air.

"Emma, I do, really," Hermione said as soothingly as possible. "_You_ don't realize the things witches and wizards are capable of. Within hours, Rikki and Cleo will be in their possession and any Muggles involved in the debacle will have their memories erased. Easy enough. The only thing left to do is register you."

"I've spent the better part of three years trying to keep this secret. How am I supposed to trust you? It goes against everything I've ever known to do something like this!" She took a breath. "Lewis, tell her!"

"Emma, these aren't the sort of people to judge you, or dissect you, or put you in a zoo--"

"He's right," Hermione chimed in. "Why would people want to look at mermaids when we've got things like dragons and unicorns to entertain us."

Emma's brain was in complete turmoil. She liked to consider herself a woman of reason, a woman of science. It simply wasn't logical to turn herself over to the government. She had sacrificed so many things in the past three years determined to keep her tail a secret. But was it so bad to reveal herself on her own terms? She had made the decision to tell Ash and while it was terrifying, it wasn't the same fear she felt when she thought of someone, say Elliot, finding out for himself. If she willingly gave the information, she had to gain some sort of power.

Emma's tight-lipped grimace slowly turned into a slight smile. "Okay," she sighed. "I'll do it."

The odd threesome managed, with a great deal of difficulty, to Side-Along Apparate into the Ministry of Magic.

A group of children that could not have been more than eight years old were being led through the magnificent building on a tour.

"Hermione Granger," one of them whispered.

"I have her Chocolate Frog card!"

"She's best friends with The Boy Who Lived--"

"I heard Harry Potter couldn't have killed You-Know-Who without her--"

"Do you think I could get her autograph?"

Lewis gave Hermione a very pointed look, to which she shrugged.

Emma, Hermione, and Lewis stepped into an empty elevator. As they

slid the door shut, a child from the tour slipped in. She wore a deep blue combination of robes and uniform- typical of Wizarding public schools.

The girl tugged on Hermione's coattail saying, "'Scuse me, miss. Could I please have your autograph?"

Hermione looked down surprised. "I'm sorry sweetie, but I'm in a bit of trouble right now. Why don't we get you back to your teacher?"

"Not yet!" Her eyes met Hermione's then darted away to the floor as she continued in what seemed like one breath. "You see, my brothers are always telling me that I'm never gonna be as good at magic as them because I'm just a girl, but I know that's not true 'cause of you. I've read The Girl Behind The Boy That Lived loads of times and I know that the War wouldn't even be close to over without your help. You're my hero."

Hermione cracked a smile. "What's your name?"

"Rose," said shyly, rocking back on her heels. "I'm eight years old which means in just three years I'm going to go to Hogwarts and be a Gryffindor just like you," she said in another breath. She opened up her rucksack and pulled out a large textbook. "I heard Hogwarts: A History is your favorite, could you sign it for me?"

"Of course, Rose," Hermione said, kneeling down to her level. "Have you got a quill?"

The girl's eyes widened. "Oh no, I forgot one!"

"I've got a pen," Lewis offered, pulling the writing instrument out of one of his many cargo pockets.

Hermione smiled graciously and accepted it. She turned to the title page of what was, in fact, her favorite book, clicked the pen, and began to write.

Rose looked on in amazement. "What's that?"

"He's my Muggle friend," Hermione confessed conspiratorially. "Here you are!"

To Rose, the next brightest witch of our age

"Thank you, thank you, thank you!" She grinned.

"It's no problem," Hermione replied. "Now let's get you back to your class."

The elevator dinged and the foursome stepped out onto the 8th floor- the Department of Magical Beings. Hermione held Rose's hand so she didn't disappear for the second time that day.

As they made their way up to the receptionist's desk, the woman tending it jumped to her feet. "Ms. Granger!" she yelled. "It's a pleasure to have you back!"

"Hello again, Kimberly. I've gotten myself in quite a situation, do

you think you could help?"

"Yes, of course what is it?" She dusted off her skirt, ready for business.

"This little one is Rose, and I'm afraid she's rather lost. And this one is Emma, she wants to register as a magical being."

"And who's that?" She asked, nodding at Lewis.

"He's just my Muggle friend along for the ride."

"The Statute of Secrecy?" she hissed.

"Oh sue me. Or just check Code 147 under the Statute. He's good to go," Hermione said, getting defensive. "Is Mrs. Bell free?"

"Yes, go right on in," she signed, resigned. "Shall I take Rose then?"

"Would you please? They may still be on the first level if you hurry."

She passed Rose's hand off to Kimberly, said her goodbyes, then lead her mermaid and Muggle down the hall to Mrs. Bell's desk.

"Mrs. Bell, I've got a friend here that would like to establish a Being Status. Sorry to interrupt, but it's rather urgent." The woman startled as Hermione spoke to her, so immersed in her paperwork she hadn't heard them approach. She was a middle-aged woman with hair so blonde it was almost white framing a round face.

"Of course, Hermione. Which friend?" She looked up with a friendly smile as she composed herself.

Hermione nudged Emma forward and introduced her.

"Alright, Emma. My name is Veronica Bell and I will be the one examining you today. If you could just follow me—" She stood and began leading the group, her short heels clicking on the reflective black floor, until they reached a door marked "Being Validification". "Right through here," she ushered them into a sterile-looking room that was in no way welcoming, but the woman nevertheless tried to make cheerful. The drab walls were papered with cheesy motivational posters that Hermione supposed could've made her smile if the situation were not so urgent. "Yes, yes, in we go." She motioned to the cold metal table. "Have a seat, if you will."

Although her eyes were worried, Emma set her jaw and hopped up onto the examining table in one confident motion. "What are you going to do to me?" she asked in as steady voice as she could muster.

"Well, we'll start with a series of questions," Mrs. Bell replied, the smile not leaving her face for an instant. "It might get boring," she said, turning to Hermione and Lewis who sat on an antique wooden bench, which although quite at home in the Wizarding World, was out-of-place in the room reminiscent of a Muggle doctor's office. "So I have a copy of today's Daily Prophet if you'd like. Or perhaps The Quibbler?"

"The Daily Prophet is alright, thank you," Hermione answered politely and Mrs. Bell reached into a drawer and pulled out the magical newspaper. Hermione accepted it and handed it to Lewis.

"The pictures move," he whispered excitedly as he pored over a story about Chinese Fireballs with plenty of photos.

Hermione nodded tolerantly but the slight upturn of her lips showed she was pleased that Lewis found trivial magical things so fascinating.

"Oh, I'm sorry, is he a Muggle?" Mrs. Bell asked, her smile getting dangerously close to becoming a mere straight face. "If I had known I'd-

"It's fine," Hermione dismissed it with the wave of a hand. "He's with me, of course."

"Absolutely," Mrs. Bell blinked. "Who would I be to question Hermione Granger's judgement?" she said with a hint of reverence in her voice.

Lewis raised an eyebrow at Hermione, daring her to explain this time. She rolled her eyes and shook her head back at him.

The over the top grin returned to Mrs. Bell's face. "Shall we begin?" She started to prattle through a never-ending list of questions. Emma's answers were recorded by a charmed quill.

Hermione tried to pay attention but lost interest on the fifth question, "What is the precise measurement of water required to trigger the metamorphosis?", at which point Emma gave a tight-lipped "I don't know" and Hermione turned her attention to the poster ahead of her. It depicted a cartoon broom charmed to zip across the paper and was captioned "Don't just fly, SOAR". Lewis noticed her eyes move and his followed to the poster.

"Can you fly?" he murmured under his breath.

"Don't you mean 'soar'?" Hermione whispered sardonically.

Lewis playfully hit her shoulder.

"Fine," she bit her lip. "I could fly if I wanted to, but I don't," she paused. "Want to, that is." She took the newspaper out of Lewis's hands and removed one of the inner folds for herself before passing it back.

"Do you wish to share why everyone around here treats you like a celebrity?" Lewis prodded. You didn't have to be particularly observant to see the way that people in Hermione's strange world treated her. At first, he had thought that perhaps everyone in the magical community knew one another, but after noticing Mrs. Bell's borderline reverence of the girl, not to mention the request for an autograph, he began to question what was up.

"No," she breathed. "I," she squeezed her eyes shut but not before Lewis caught the pain reflected in them. "I don't wish to share." Her eyelids came up along with her gaze, pleading Lewis not to go further. Sometimes if he looked into Hermione's eyes, he saw much

more than the troubles of an 19-year-old girl, and it frightened him.

"Oh god, I'm sorry I didn't mean to upset you," Lewis began to panic, as his only experience with girls was the frequently hysterical Cleo.

"No, no it's fine, really. You couldn't have known not to ask," her strained face turned reassuring. "I mean honestly I didn't even realize I didn't want people asking until now. Usually it doesn't come up in conversation because all my friends are famous, too." She took a breath and composed herself. "I suppose I'll be getting these kinds of questions soon from the girls anyway. I'm a war hero, Lewis. And I'd really love to forget about it, but as you can see that's not happening anytime soon."

"Oh," Lewis squeaked out.

"And I realize I was kind of nonchalant about the whole thing back in Australia, but coming back here brings back a lot of memories that I'd prefer to keep buried."

They went back to sitting quietly, each reading their own section of The Daily Prophet. Mrs. Bell's insanely cheerful voice turned monotonous to their ears as she neared question twenty and Emma was getting no more pleasant in her responses. Hermione cursed herself for not keeping her notes on the mermaids on her at all times.

"Length of tail?" she asked almost giddily.

Hermione, sensing Emma's patience reaching its breaking point, interrupted. "Mrs. Bell?"

"Yes, dear?"

"For Merlin's sake, why don't you just measure it?" she said, as sweetly as possible. She knew the Ministry could clean up their mess, but they were running short on time.

"Brilliant, brilliant, yes we'll do just that!" She stood up from her stool. "Emma, if you could just move your legs up here," she patted the end of the table and Emma complied. "Yes, perfect. Now hold still. Aguamenti." A jet of water shot out of the tip of her wand, promptly hitting Emma in the face.

Emma, impatient before, was now seething as she flicked the water out of her eyes with her palms.

"Oh dear! Aim was never my strong suit. Ten seconds, you said?" She sang out a countdown, marvelling at the transformation that took place after one. "Beautiful, just beautiful."

A tape measure appeared and took Emma's measurements.

End
file.